Meta-awareness of Bias in Intimate Relationships

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Abstract

Prior research has demonstrated that individuals hold positively biased views of their intimate partners (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a). The current research investigated meta-awareness of bias in partner judgments. In Study 1 ($N = 50$) individuals read one of three vignettes depicting intimate relationships of varying quality, and then rated the extent to which the fictional partners over- or under-estimated each other's mate value. As predicted, participants reported that fictional partners in happier relationships were more likely to be positively biased in judging their partners. In Study 2 ($N = 124$) individuals in intimate relationships provided explicit reports of the extent to which, a) they over- or under-estimated their partners' mate value, and b) their own mate value was over- or under-estimated by their partners. As expected, individuals perceived that their own judgments of their partners, and their partners' judgments of self, were positively biased. Moderators of these associations were also investigated. In Study 3, the results of Study 2 were replicated and extended with a sample of 57 couples. Mate value judgments were both perceived as positively biased, and actually were positively biased, at the mean level. Critically, SEM analyses showed that people who actually were more positively biased in judging their partners' mate value, a) perceived themselves as more positively biased, and b) were perceived by their partners as more positively biased. These findings suggest that positive bias in partner judgments is a normative and consciously accessible feature of intimate relationships, and that intimate relationships are characterized by significant reality tracking.

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A Brief History of Bias and Accuracy Research

Bias and accuracy research has a long history in the psychological sciences, beginning in the 1920s when attempts were made to identify the personality characteristics associated with being a good judge of other people, and with high social intelligence more generally. Many studies on bias and accuracy appeared in the literature from the 1920s until the mid 1950s. The central focus of this early research concerned individual differences in people's ability to judge others' personalities (Kenny, 1994). However, in 1955, a methodological critique by Cronbach challenged the validity of much of the existing research.

Cronbach's (1955) concerns centered on the measurement of accuracy. The prevailing method for measuring judgmental accuracy up until Cronbach's article was to compute a difference score between a judge's rating of a target on a particular trait and the target's self-rating on the same trait. Cronbach showed that using difference scores to measure accuracy is problematic because difference scores are potentially affected by measurement artifacts that can produce inflated estimates of accuracy. Cronbach identified assumed similarity, elevation, differential elevation, and stereotype accuracy, as confounds that can potentially contaminate difference scores (see Kenny & Albright, 1987; Thomas, 1999). Assumed similarity inflates accuracy correlations when judges project their own characteristics onto targets, and the judge and the target actually happen to be similar. Stereotype accuracy refers to when a judge provides ratings that resemble the prototypical person, and the target happens to share the characteristics of this prototypical person. Finally, elevation and differential elevation both refer to inflated

accuracy correlations arising from when the judge and target share tendencies to respond to the rating scale in the same way (Thomas, 1999).

The concerns Cronbach (1955) raised in his seminal article led many in the field to reconsider the validity of the prior accuracy research that had used difference scores. Cronbach proposed statistical solutions for overcoming these problems; however, these solutions were difficult to implement in the pre-computer age and proved a barrier to new research. Consequently, there was a shift away from measuring how well lay judgments reflected reality, toward research on how social perception processes operate (regardless of their validity).

From the late 1950s until the 1980s, a popular area of research focused on various errors and biases influencing social judgments (e.g., the fundamental attribution error, the false consensus effect, and the confirmation bias). The outcome of this sustained research endeavor was that by the 1980s social cognition was commonly viewed as hopelessly biased and fundamentally flawed. Fiske and Taylor (1984) summarized the widespread conclusion at that time: "Instead of a naïve scientist entering the environment in search of the truth, we find the rather unflattering picture of a charlatan trying to make the data come out in a manner most advantageous to his or her already held theories" (p. 88).

In the last two decades, the pendulum has shifted once again to a more respectful stance towards lay cognition. This shift was precipitated by many factors, not least of which was a general disquiet with the prevailing grim view of social cognition (see Funder, 1995, for a review). Such general disquiet was in turn partly based on three factors. First, there seemed to be an incongruence between the idea of social cognition being seriously flawed and human success in many other domains requiring accuracy and

social intelligence. Second, it was increasingly acknowledged that, although social judgments are sometimes fast and heuristic-driven, in other situations they are much more calculated and deliberate. Third, researchers once again began to pay attention to the role of individual differences in social cognition (see, for example, Thomas & Fletcher, 2003).

During this renaissance of interest in the accuracy of person perception, many studies have emerged showing that people's judgments of others are typically quite accurate (see Funder, 1995 for a review). Moreover, theories have also begun to emerge that go beyond the proximal-level cognitive processes involved in social judgments. For example, Haselton and Nettle (in press), and Fletcher, Simpson, and Boyes (in press) have outlined models grounded in evolutionary psychological theory which recast judgmental biases as useful adaptations rather than in terms of hopeless shortcomings.

A significant conceptual and methodological issue, however, still bedevils the field; namely, the need to make adequate and clear distinctions between bias and accuracy – two potentially independent but commonly confounded constructs (see Fletcher et al., in press; Gagne & Lydon, 2004). I will address this distinction shortly, but before doing so it is important to discuss some markedly different ways in which the nature of bias has been conceptualized in social and personality psychology.

Conceptualizations of Bias

Theory-Guided Judgments

One way in which bias has been defined is in terms of how prior lay theories influence judgments. When people make social judgments they typically utilize both

incoming data *and* their pre-existing theories and beliefs. If people approached the world in a completely open-minded and atheoretical manner it would be impossible to successfully navigate the mass of information encountered in daily life. However, lay theories (knowledge structures) tend to have a biasing effect on judgments. To illustrate this point, I will use an example adapted from Fletcher et al. (in press). Consider Susan and her husband John. If Susan is asked to judge how similar she is to John on certain personality dimensions, she is likely to do so by considering her implicit theories about people in general, her relationship-specific theories, and any potential diagnostic information that is available. Assume that one of Susan's theories about intimate relationships is that similarity between partners is critical for relationship success. If Susan is happy with her relationship with John, then she is likely to (quite rationally) overestimate the similarity between John's personality and her own.

Historically, it has been commonly assumed that theory-guided judgments will be less valid than those based on incoming data, or suspect in some way. However, it is standard scientific procedure for data to be interpreted and weighted in terms of prior theories (a Bayesian approach). In a similar vein, there is growing theoretical and empirical support for the argument that theory-guided biases have evolved precisely because, overall, they tend to enhance the validity (accuracy) of judgments (or at least did so in our ancestral past; e.g., Haselton & Nettle, in press; Krueger & Funder, 2004). Krueger and Funder (see also Kenny & Acitelli, 2001) have argued that social-cognitive biases tend to increase accuracy overall. Moreover, there is evidence that biased judgments have beneficial consequences independent of this increase in accuracy. For example, a recent study found that people are generally happier with their intimate

relationships when they believe that their partners are highly similar to self, over and above actual similarity between self and partner (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). In summary, theory-guided judgments are arguably essential heuristics for navigating through life and increasing the predictability of the world.

Error Management Theory

The way bias has been conceptualized within the context of Error Management Theory (EMT) is markedly different from the previous example. EMT takes an evolutionary psychological perspective, and aims to provide a broad explanatory framework for understanding judgmental and reasoning biases. EMT explains specific biases in terms of the fitness advantages associated with particular types of biased reasoning in the ancestral past.

EMT is based on signal detection approach in which a positive bias implies that the individual is likely to form a belief that is true (when it is false), and a negative bias implies that an individual is likely to form a belief that is false (when it is true). Within the context of EMT, the terms positive and negative bias are not evaluative - a positive bias is not necessarily desirable, nor does positive bias mean that a judgment is more positive (favorable) than a reality benchmark. From an EMT perspective, whether a positive or negative bias is more desirable will depend on the relative costs and benefits of false positives (positive bias) vs. false negatives (negative bias). For example, in the context of a cancer screening program, the cost of failing to detect cancer in an individual who has cancer (negative bias) is very high, whilst the costs of positive bias are lower. Therefore, in this instance, a positive bias is desirable. Haselton and Nettle (in press)

argue that an EMT perspective can be used to explain why people make overly optimistic judgments in some domains, and overly cautious judgments in other domains, creating a tendency for people to behave in a way they described as the "paranoid optimist."

An interesting feature of EMT is that it predicts sex differences when judgments have been associated with different cost asymmetries for men and women over the course of evolutionary history. For example, in our ancestral past it was more costly for men to miss a sexual possibility than to infer a sexual interest where none existed (because men's reproductive potential is directly proportional to how many sexual partners they have). On this basis, Haselton and Buss (2000) argued that men should display a positive bias in judging the sexual interest of women with whom they interact.

However, for women, sex in the absence of commitment carries the high potential cost of becoming pregnant without the support of a reliable mate. For women, assuming a man is willing to commit to a long-term relationship when he is not, is more costly than missing signs of a genuine desire to commit. Thus, EMT predicts that women should set high standards for judging men's desire to commit, and consequently should underestimate the extent to which men with whom they interact desire a long term relationship. Consistent with these predictions, Haselton and Buss (2000) found that men (but not women) tend to overestimate sexual interest on the part of women (a positive bias, or preference for false positives). In contrast, women (but not men) tended to underestimate men's desire for a long-term relationship (a negative bias, or preference for false negatives).

EMT is a promising theory due to its broad explanatory power and preliminary empirical support. It also provides a useful framework for making predictions about

which types of biases (positive vs. negative) will be observed under specific circumstances. Finally, a valuable feature of EMT is that it attempts to go beyond proximal-level mechanisms in explaining judgmental biases.

Overall Positivity or Negativity of Judgments Compared to a Reality Benchmark

A third major way that bias has been conceptualized (and is conceptualized in the present research) is as the tendency for perceivers to be either more positive or more negative relative to some criterion measure. In contrast to EMT, the terms positive and negative bias are evaluative from this perspective. A positive bias refers to when a judgment is more favorable (positive) than a reality benchmark. A negative bias refers when a judgment is less favorable than a reality benchmark.

I will elaborate further on this type of bias in the next section which focuses on the distinction between this type of bias, and accuracy.

The Distinction Between Bias and Accuracy

Bias and accuracy are separate but related, and commonly confounded, constructs (Fletcher, 2002; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). As previously mentioned, in the present research, the term bias is used to refer to the tendency for individuals or groups of perceivers to be either more positive or more negative relative to some criterion measure. In contrast, accuracy (at least one important variety) refers to how well a pattern of judgments matches the set of criteria which serves as the benchmark.

I will use an example (adapted from Fletcher, 2002) to illustrate the difference between bias and accuracy. Consider John and Jane, a married couple. Jane rates herself a 4 for intelligence, a 5 for warmth and a 6 for beauty (see Table 1). These ratings constitute the criterion scores for computing both bias and accuracy – it is assumed in this example that they are accurate. If John's ratings of Jane exactly matched Jane's ratings of herself, John's perceptions would be both unbiased and completely accurate (see Table 1). If John produced ratings of 6 for intelligence, 7 for warmth, and 8 for beauty, he would be perfectly accurate in the sense that he is tracking Jane's own judgments; however, he is also positively biased (by an average of two points overall). In contrast, if John were to rate Jane as 5 for intelligence, 6 for warmth, and 4 for beauty, he would be unbiased (his overall level of positivity is identical to Jane's). However, John's perceptions are also inaccurate because his pattern of partner ratings diverges considerably from Jane's self-perceptions. Finally, if John rated Jane according to the last row of Table 1 he would be both positively biased and inaccurate. As can be seen, bias and accuracy are relatively independent constructs.

Table 1
Examples of Different Combinations of Bias and Accuracy

	Intelligence	Warmth	Beauty	Total of all ratings	Correlation
Jane's self-perceptions	4	5	6	15	
John's perceptions of Jane					
High accuracy/ no bias	4	5	6	15	1.0**
High accuracy/ Positive bias	6	7	8	21	1.0**
Low accuracy/ no bias	5	6	4	15	-0.5
Low accuracy/ positive bias	7	8	6	21	-0.5

Note. $^{**}p < .01$.

Now that I have clarified the definitions and associated measurement of bias and accuracy, I will deal in the next chapter with the existing literature on bias and accuracy in intimate partner judgments – the topic of the present research.

CHAPTER 2: BIAS AND ACCURACY IN PARTNER JUDGMENTS

Bias in Partner Judgments

Mean Levels of Bias

When bias in partner judgments has been investigated using the final method described in the previous section, the results have typically shown that, on average, partner judgments are significantly more positive than the target's self-perceptions (e.g., Fletcher & Boyes, 2004; Murray et al., 1996a). That is, partner judgments tend to be positively biased. Interestingly, comparing partner perceptions to the target's self-perceptions in this way provides a conservative assessment of the extent to which partner perceptions are positively biased, because self-perceptions are typically biased in a self-serving fashion (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Numerous other positive biases in partner and relationship judgments have been demonstrated. People tend to, a) exaggerate the degree to which they are similar to their partners (Murray et al., 2002), b) retrospectively embellish their memories of being happy at earlier points in their relationships (Karney & Frye, 2002), c) exaggerate the degree to which their partners resemble their ideal partners (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b), and d) see their relationships as superior to other relationships (Fowers, Veingrad, & Dominicis, 2002; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). Moreover, individuals in happier, more stable relationships are more likely to display these partner-serving biases than individuals in poorer quality relationships.

Error Management Theory. Error Management Theory predicts that overall positive bias will not be evident for all types of judgments. From an EMT perspective whether partner perceptions are positively biased, unbiased, or even negatively biased,

will depend on the cost asymmetries associated with overly optimistic or overly pessimistic judgments in our ancestral past. It is important to note that I am not using the terms positive and negative bias here in the same way they are used in EMT (see Chapter 1), which defines positive and negative bias in terms of over- or underestimating the truth value of a belief. Rather, I am making the point that an EMT perspective suggests that not all types of partner and relationship judgments should be positively biased.

Several studies have indeed found evidence of negatively biased partner judgments. For example, a study by Friesen, Fletcher, and Overall (2005) found that people tend to underestimate the extent to which their partners have forgiven them following a transgression (a negativity bias). Friesen and colleagues explained this effect in terms of the high potential cost of overestimating forgiveness. When an individual has not been forgiven by their partner, they need to instigate relationship-repair behaviors in order to actually elicit forgiveness. If individuals overestimate the extent to which their partners have forgiven them, they may not engage in relationship-repair behaviors to the extent required, potentially compromising the relationship. This explanation is consistent with EMT, that is positive illusions were not evident in people's judgments of how much their partners had forgiven them because overestimating forgiveness is potentially costly for the perceiver (Haselton & Nettle, in press).

Bias and Relationship Quality

An extensive body of research suggests that positively biased partner judgments play a central role in the maintenance of relationship satisfaction. The more positively individuals view their partners (taking into account the target's self-perceptions), the

more satisfied both perceivers and targets tend to be with the relationship (Fletcher & Boyes, 2004; Murray et al.,1996a; Murray et al., 1996b). Moreover, greater positive bias in partner judgments also predicts later increases in satisfaction, decreases in conflict and relationship-related doubts, and greater relationship stability (Murray et al., 1996b).

There are, however, likely to be limits in the extent to which positively biased partner judgments benefit relationships, even when judgments are positively biased at the mean level. Most of the research in this area has reported moderate levels of positive bias in partner evaluations. Thus, the effects of grossly unrealistic partner perceptions are largely unknown. However, it is easy to imagine how partner perceptions which bear little or no resemblance to reality might be detrimental to the relationship. For example, imagine the following scenario. Norman believes that his girlfriend Jean is an undiscovered musical genius but in reality Jean has no talent in this area. Norman's conviction that Jean will be discovered and become famous leads him to quit his job in order to manage her career. Jean has a more realistic perception of her own abilities but can do nothing to dissuade Norman from his vision for their future. Jean is anxious that Norman will eventually realize she is not musically gifted and that when this happens he will leave her.

Research on Self-Verification Theory has provided evidence that positively biased partner perceptions do not always have positive effects on relationship well-being (e.g., Swann, de la Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann, Hixon, & de la Ronde, 1992). The basic tenet of Self-Verification Theory is that people seek and prefer appraisals that match their own self-perceptions. The desire for self-verifying appraisals is proposed to stem from the need for predictability and control in one's social world (Swann, 1990).

Self-Verification Theory predicts that individuals will be most satisfied with intimate relationships when their partners' view of them matches their self-perceptions, regardless of the extent to which their self-perceptions are realistic (unbiased) or accurate.

Research on Self-Verification Theory is difficult to interpret for several reasons. First, it is not clear whether Self-Verification Theory refers to bias, accuracy, or both (in terms of how I have defined bias and accuracy in this thesis). Self-Verification research on how people want their partners to view them (desired appraisals) has mainly been concerned with bias, that is whether people desire appraisals that are more positive than their self-judgments, or desire appraisals that match the positivity of their self judgments (e.g., Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). In contrast, Self-Verification research on the effects of actual partner judgments on targets' relationship satisfaction has predominantly focused on accuracy (e.g., Gill & Swann, 2004).

Second, bias and accuracy are routinely confounded in much of the research on Self-Verification Theory. For example, one of the most heavily cited articles on Self-Verification Theory is Swann et al. (1992). In this study, dating individuals who were perceived more positively by their partners rated their relationships as more intimate, regardless of the positivity of the targets' self-judgments. In contrast, for married individuals, targets' self-perceptions moderated the effect of partner appraisals on targets' intimacy ratings. Married individuals with highly positive self-views rated their relationships as more intimate when their partners perceived them more positively. However, those with relatively negative self-perceptions rated their relationships as less intimate when their partners viewed them more positively. These findings seem to be a

mixture of both bias and accuracy; rendering the results difficult to interpret independently in terms of bias and accuracy.

Third, most research on Self-Verification Theory has assessed self and partner perceptions using items from the Self Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ). Most of the judgments assessed by this scale are relatively unimportant, or only moderately important, in intimate relationship contexts (i.e., artistic ability, musical ability, leadership ability, common sense, and social skills). The two remaining items that comprise this scale are central to mate evaluation processes (attractiveness and intellectual ability). Much of the research that has linked more positively biased appraisals with more positive relationship well-being has deliberately focused on the judgments most central to mate evaluation processes. These methodological differences make valid comparisons between studies that have used the SAQ and other research problematic. Importantly, recent research on Self-Verification Theory has shown that individuals desire positively biased appraisals when the appraisal is highly relevant for the relationship between the perceiver and target, but desire unbiased appraisals when the appraisal is relatively unimportant (Swann et al., 2002). Thus, it seems that self-verification motives are limited to low-relevance judgments, and high-relevance judgments are predominately influenced by positivity goals. Therefore, the extent to which individuals are viewed positively by their partners should exert considerably more influence on overall relationship well-being than the extent to which each partner verifies the other's self-perceptions (Gill & Swann, 2004).

An obvious way for individuals to simultaneously feel both understood by their partners and that their partners see them in the best possible light is through appraisals

which are both moderately positively biased and accurate (recall that appraisals that are simultaneously biased and accurate are quite possible). Research that has looked at the association between accuracy in partner judgments and relationship quality has produced mixed findings, with null findings being common (see Fletcher, 2002, or Fletcher et al., in press, for a review). Whether bias and accuracy interact, such that high positive bias/high accuracy constitutes the most contented group and low accuracy/high negative bias constitutes the unhappiest group, is an open empirical question - interactions of this sort have rarely been tested in prior research.

However, Katz and Beach (2000) provide some preliminary evidence that bias and accuracy do interact, at least in the context of initial mate selection. This study investigated initial attraction to potential romantic partners using an experimental design in which participants were given bogus feedback from four fictional potential partners. The four fictional potential partners had allegedly read descriptions of participants that participants themselves had provided, and based on the descriptions, were interested in a relationship with the participant.

Participants were told that the fictional potential mates were asked to describe why they were interested in a possible relationship with the participant. These descriptions constituted the feedback given to participants. The research team constructed individualized feedback based on participants' self-perceptions. One set of feedback was positively biased but accurate, one was positively biased but inaccurate, one was unbiased but accurate, and the last was unbiased and inaccurate. The dependent variable in this study was participants' interest in future contact with the fictional potential mates after reading the bogus feedback.

The results showed significant main effects for positive bias and accuracy, indicating that people were more interested in future contact with fictional people who had provided positively biased or accurate feedback. However, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction effect. Unpacking this interaction effect revealed that, as predicted, people were most interested in future contact with fictional potential partners who had provided positively biased and accurate feedback, and least attracted to fictional people who provided unbiased and inaccurate feedback. Since Katz and Beach (2000) research focuses on initial mate selection, further research is necessary on the interaction between bias and accuracy in the context of ongoing relationships.

Mechanisms Producing Biased Partner Perceptions: The Role of the Perceiver's Self-Perceptions

An extensive program of research examining how biased partner judgments are produced has been conducted by Murray and her colleagues (see Murray, 2005, for a review). One focus of their research is the role of the perceiver's self-perceptions in producing partner judgments.

Murray et al. (e.g., Murray & Holmes, 1997; Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b) have proposed that biased partner perceptions are produced as a result of individuals assuming similarity between their current partners and, 1) their own self-perceptions, and 2) their ideal standards for a partner. For example, imagine that Jane is very trustworthy. She assumes that her husband John is also very trustworthy. Likewise, if it is important to Jane that her partner has a good job, Jane is likely to exaggerate the desirability of John's current job or, at least his prospects for obtaining a well paid, high status job. If John is a

poorly paid junior academic, Jane may emphasize his prospects of promotion or his options for earning more money in the private sector.

Murray's group have argued that the perceiver's self-perceptions constrain the positivity of partner perceptions in several different ways. First, since individuals tend to assume their partners are similar to themselves, individuals with less positive self-perceptions will also have less positive partner perceptions (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000).

Second, individuals with more positive self-perceptions tend to have higher ideal standards for a partner (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000). In the mating game, the goal is to obtain and maintain a relationship with the most desirable partner possible. Therefore an individual's ideal standards tend to be tied to his or her own mate value because it is difficult to attract a partner who has significantly higher mate value than self, and a larger gap in mate value across partners increases the chances the more desirable individual will either reject advances out of hand, or leave the relationship for greener pastures after the relationship has been established (see Fletcher, 2002, for a review).

Third, Murray and colleagues (e.g., Murray et al., 2000; Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998) have developed and found support for the Dependency Regulation Model which predicts that, 1) self-perceptions limit the extent to which reflected appraisals are positive, and 2) reflected appraisals in turn limit the positivity of partner perceptions. The term reflected appraisals refers to Partner A's perceptions of how Partner B perceives Partner A (i.e., how do I think my partner judges me). As previously mentioned, Murray and colleagues argue that people assume that their partners see them in a similar ways to how they see themselves. For example, if John believes he

is very sexy, he will assume Jane perceives him as very sexy. Due to assumed similarity processes, people with less positive self-esteem tend to have less positive reflected appraisals – they are less confident that they are regarded positively by their partners than individuals with more positive self-esteem.

Moreover, according to the Dependency Regulation Model, reflected appraisals have a causal effect on partner perceptions because individuals are reluctant to fully commit to their relationships until their feel sure that their partners perceive them positively. Murray et al. (1998) propose that partner perceptions reflect how valuable the relationship is to the perceiver. Because the possibility of losing a highly desirable partner is very threatening, people with less positive reflected appraisals typically report less positive partner perceptions. According to Murray et al., (1998), people with low self-esteem (unconsciously) hold back their love and admiration for their partners to make the possibility of being rejected feel less threatening. In contrast, since people with high self-esteem have very positive reflected appraisals, their partners become a resource for self-affirmation, which in turn makes the relationship more important to self. In addition, having an adoring partner makes the possibility of rejection unlikely and thus reduces the interpersonal risk of investing in the relationship. Consequently, people with higher self-esteem report more positive partner perceptions. Empirical support for this aspect of the Dependency Regulation Model (i.e., the causal path from reflected appraisals to partner perceptions) has been mixed. For example, Fletcher and Boyes (2004) found that experimentally manipulating self-perceptions led to corresponding domain-specific changes in reflected appraisals but not partner perceptions.

As can be seen in the Dependency Regulation Model, the main focus of Murray et al.'s research is on mechanisms that are rooted in perceivers' heads as opposed to relationship reality. Although they readily acknowledge that bias processes are subject to reality constraints, the extent to which partner perceptions reflect the partner's actual qualities and attributes (an accuracy effect) is deemphasized in the majority of their research. They have typically treated accuracy effects as something that should be controlled for in examining bias processes.

Reality Constraints and Awareness of Bias

In the research I have described above, bias is generally treated as an unconscious process, produced (in large part) by intrapsychic mechanisms. The unconscious, intrapsychic nature of bias is typically an implicit assumption, although some authors have discussed it explicitly. For example, Rusbult, Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, and Verette (2000) stated that "...illusory beliefs are not necessarily consciously acquired, nor do the mechanisms underlying such patterns necessarily result from deliberate effort" (p. 523). They go on to suggest that "On critical occasions one may consciously bring about such a state of mind – for example, one may deliberately achieve a sense of gratitude by reviewing his or her partner's finest qualities or by bringing to mind the limitations of others' relationships" (p. 523). However, their general assumption is that instances in which individuals have insight into their own biases are the exception rather than the norm.

Although the unconscious, intrapsychic nature of bias is a pervasive assumption in the literature on bias in intimate relationship judgments, it has not been explicitly

tested. In this section, I will outline empirical and theoretical arguments that support the claim that individuals should have considerable conscious awareness of (and insight into) biases in the domain of intimate partner judgments.

Why are People Likely to have Insight into Relationship-Related Biases?

There is substantial evidence that individuals are generally tuned into the objective interpersonal reality they share with their partners. Individuals who believe that their partners and relationships are wonderful are not necessarily building castles in the air. Rather, such evaluations are typically anchored in the objective realities of relationships, which are observable by outsiders and reliably predict the future course of the relationship (Fletcher, 2002). For instance, individuals who evaluate their partners and relationships more positively tend to discuss relationship problems in a more constructive fashion than individuals who perceive their partners and relationships in less glowing terms (Fletcher & Thomas, 2000). Romantic partners also share similar relationship evaluations (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001), and the negativity of joint relationship evaluations is one of the best predictors of dissolution in both dating and married couples (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Further, people's judgments of their partners tend to be reasonably accurate, as well as being positively biased. Accuracy in partner judgments has been most commonly measured by examining the correlation between Partner A's perceptions of Partner B and (in lieu of any gold standard for reality) a proxy measure of Partner B's actual qualities. The most widely used benchmark for accuracy has been the target's (Partner B's) self-perceptions. Recall that bias is also traditionally assessed by comparing partner

perceptions to the target's self-perceptions at the mean level (using ANOVAs or t-tests). Prior research has typically demonstrated both positive bias and significant levels of accuracy; that is, partner perceptions tend to be significantly correlated with targets' self-perceptions (e.g., Gill & Swann, 2004; Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b).

An important subset of studies on the accuracy of partner perceptions compares relationship insiders' accuracy with that of observers (i.e., strangers or people who know one or both members of the couple well). The results have been mixed. Thomas and Fletcher (2003) compared the accuracy of relationship insiders to the accuracy of close friends or strangers using a mind-reading paradigm. In this study, dating couples engaged in a short problem solving discussion, and then each partner (independently) reported the thoughts and feelings they had at points during the discussion. Partners, friends, and strangers then reviewed a videotape of the discussion and tried to infer the thoughts and feelings of each relationship insider. Mind-reading accuracy was assessed by comparing Partner A's perceptions of the Partner B's thoughts and feelings with the Partner B's self-reports. The results showed that partners were significantly more accurate than either friends or strangers.

In contrast, MacDonald and Ross (1999) found that although relationship insiders made quite accurate predictions about the likelihood of their relationships remaining intact, their predictions were less accurate than either parents' or roommates' predictions. Interestingly, relationship insiders' relationship quality ratings predicted relationship longevity better than either parents' or roommates' predictions about break-up.

In summary, across various methods, most studies that have investigated the accuracy of partner judgments have revealed quite respectable levels of accuracy (usually in the r = .20 to .60 range).

Interpersonal behavior. Partners routinely convey how they view each other in the context of their shared day-to-day interactions. Stereotypes for these types of interactions come easily to mind. One such stereotype involves the normative expectations of how individuals should react when partners express self-doubt. For example, imagine that John is applying for a job at a more prestigious college than the one where he is currently employed. Despondently, he tells his wife Jane that he does not think he will get the job because a rival applicant's publication record is better than his publication record. A typical response would be for Jane to act in a way to boost John's self-esteem, such as stating reasons why she believes he would be the best candidate for the position.

The common occurrence of behavioral exchanges of the type I have described means that individuals are likely to be aware of the relative standing of their partner perceptions vis-à-vis their partners' self-perceptions. Conversely, individuals will also be aware of how they are perceived by their partners in relation to their own self-perceptions. Moreover, it may be a normative requirement in intimate relationships that when an individual expresses self-doubt, the partner should provide feedback to quash this doubt. For example, when a woman asks her partner if a new dress flatters her figure, she will typically expect that her partner will respond in an emphatically positive fashion (even if his actual perception is more negative).

Although there is little hard evidence supporting these plausible claims, indirect empirical evidence does support the idea that individuals regularly communicate their partner perceptions to their partners. As I have previously noted, the extent to which partner judgments are positively biased is associated with both the perceiver's and *the target's* relationship satisfaction - more positively biased partner judgments are associated with both the perceiver *and the target* being more satisfied with the relationship (Murray et al., 1996a). For example, let's return to my hypothetical couple. Jane is more optimistic than John about his career prospects. The literature suggests that both Jane and John are likely to be more satisfied with their relationship in this scenario than if Jane were more realistic (less positively biased). The effect of the perceiver's bias on the target's satisfaction implies that the perceiver somehow behaviorally conveys his/her rose-tinted judgments to the partner, and that the partner is attuned to these behaviors. In other words, Jane must be conveying her optimism to John, and John must be accurately reading and understanding this message.

Another finding that suggests that people behaviorally convey their evaluations of their partners to their partners is that, over time, people incorporate aspects of their partners' positively biased appraisals into their own self-perceptions (Murray et al. 1996b). This effect indicates that people are attuned to how they are being evaluated by their partners, and that over time they adjust their perceptions of their own mate value accordingly. Note that this finding is predicted by Sociometer Theory, the central tenet of which is that self-esteem is a gauge which responds to feedback from other people about levels of interpersonal acceptance (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995).

Research on partner regulation further supports the idea that people typically communicate their partner perceptions to their partners. A recent study by Overall, Fletcher and Simpson (2005) suggested that partner regulation attempts provide information to the recipients concerning how their partners view them along quite specific trait dimensions. This study found that individuals reported quite frequently attempting to change their partners in domains that are central to mate-evaluation. Regulation attempts by individuals influenced their partners in three independent ways: partners who were the target of regulation attempts formed more negative self-perceptions, targets became more aware of how their partners actually viewed them, and targets became more motivated to self-regulate on the same qualities. Moreover, these findings were not simply a function of overall affect or relationship evaluations, but were specific to given trait dimensions. These findings imply that regulation attempts successfully communicate how people feel about their partners along quite specific trait dimensions.

Finally, people's prior experiences in intimate relationships, and their observations of others' relationships, may give them some insight into relationship-related biases. Partner perceptions become more negatively biased when a relationship turns bad and dissolves (Murray et al., 1996b). Since most individuals will have experienced failed relationships before their current relationships, they are likely to have had the experience of their partner perceptions becoming more negatively biased in the latter stages of failed relationships. Consequently, individuals are likely to have some understanding of how (at least in their past) their bonds with a partner might have colored their evaluations. They will also have observed positively biased partner perceptions in

other happy couples, and how other people's perceptions of their partners change when relationships deteriorate (e.g., intense hostility in divorcing couples).

To summarize, there are both theoretical and empirical grounds for postulating that individuals are likely to be aware of (and have some insight into) biased judgments in their intimate relationships. However, no prior systematic research (to my knowledge) has tested this thesis, or examined its implications, which brings me to the current research.

CHAPTER 3: THE CURRENT RESEARCH

General Aims of This Thesis

The overarching goal of the current research was to test the hypothesis that individuals are (to some extent) aware of biases in the domain of intimate partner evaluations. Accordingly, I expected the following general predictions should be confirmed. First, individuals should generally believe that happy, successful relationships are characterized by positively biased partner judgments. Second, individuals should generally believe that their own intimate relationships are characterized by positively biased partner judgments. Third, individuals' ratings of the extent to which their own intimate relationships are characterized by biased partner judgments should reflect the actual levels of bias present in the relationship (from self to partner and partner to self).

As well as these core predictions about meta-perceptions of bias, I assessed overall levels of actual bias and accuracy, and associations between relationship quality and actual bias or accuracy. The purpose of these analyses was to replicate previous research, and test novel hypotheses about the effect of judgment type on both overall bias and accuracy, and the correlates of bias and accuracy (e.g., relationship quality and self-esteem). I explicate all of my predictions next.

Stereotypes about Bias in Intimate Partner Judgments

My expectation was that people's stereotypes would be consistent with scientific findings regarding bias in partner judgments. In short, the stereotype of a stable, happy relationship should incorporate the notion that the partners exaggerate each other's

positive qualities and minimize each other's faults. In contrast, I predicted that the stereotype of an unhappy relationship would incorporate the reverse pattern – the partners should overestimate each other's faults and overlook each other's strengths. These stereotypes are important because they may influence the types of appraisals people desire from their own intimate partners, and how they interpret biases they detect in their own relationships. If individuals believe that stable, happy relationships are typically characterized by positively biased partner perceptions then I would expect people to view positively biased appraisals as desirable (at least for qualities that are central to mate evaluation processes).

People's Perceptions of Bias in their Own Intimate Relationships

Although individuals' beliefs about how they are perceived by their partners have been studied in a limited way in research on reflected appraisals, no research (to my knowledge) has examined explicit perceptions of bias in the intimate domain. Based on the explanations provided in the preceding section, I expected that, at the mean level, Partner A would, 1) believe his or her perceptions of Partner B were more positive than Partner B's real self, and 2) believe that Partner B perceived Partner A more positively than Partner A's real self.

A considerable amount of research has focused on associations between actual bias and relationship quality, but little is known about associations between meta-perceptions of bias and relationship quality. Perceptions of greater positive bias in partner judgments could plausibly be related to perceptions of either more positive or more negative relationship quality. For example, returning to my hypothetical couple, Jane may

be less satisfied with and less committed to her relationship with John, the more she perceives John as overestimating her beauty. Her perception that John is positively biased could result in her feeling that their relationship is built on an inauthentic foundation that cannot be maintained in the long term (as would be predicted by Self-Verification Theory). Jane may believe that in the long term John will begin to notice her cellulite and bulbous nose, develop a more realistic appraisal of her appearance, and become disenchanted with their relationship. However, the opposite scenario is also plausible. Jane may see John's generous perception of her beauty as a fitting with her normative expectations of a happy, stable relationship. Thus, she may see John's distorted perception of her as a sign that he really loves her, and this should increase her positive feelings toward John and their relationship. In order to investigate these questions, the current research examines the association between perceptions of bias and relationship quality (and several potential moderators of this association).

If people generally perceive their own and their partners' mate evaluations as positively biased, as I predict, this raises the additional question of whether meta-perceptions of bias are accurate at the individual/relationship level or whether they merely reflect normative beliefs about intimate relationships in general. This research explores this question from two different angles. First, I assessed the association between how biased individuals' partner judgments actually were and how biased they perceived them to be. I postulated that people who perceived themselves as being more positively biased, would actually be more biased. Second, I investigated the association between how biased individuals' partner judgments actually were, and how biased they were perceived to be by their partners. I predicted that people who actually were more biased,

would be perceived as being more biased by their partners. For Partner A to accurately judge how biased Partner B is in judging Partner A, Partner A must infer how he is perceived by his partner and compare this information to his own self-perceived mate value. This is a subtle and difficult task and constitutes a high standard for judging meta-awareness of bias. To summarize, I expected that Jane would accurately perceive how biased her perceptions of John are, and also how biased John's perceptions of her are.

The Moderating Effect of Judgment Type on Overall Bias and Accuracy, and Associations between Bias/Accuracy and Perceived Relationship Quality

There is an ongoing debate in the literature about the effects of judgment type on overall bias and accuracy, and the moderating effects of judgment type on the association between relationship quality and bias or accuracy. Neff and Karney (2002a, 2002b) have postulated that the level of specificity of the judgment is the key factor. They have found that people are most satisfied with their relationships when their partners judge their global traits in positively biased fashion, but judge their specific traits in a significantly accurate fashion. Neff and Karney argue that this scenario allows people to simultaneously have their positivity and accuracy needs met, and means that specific areas of partner dissatisfaction can exist without infecting global partner and relationship evaluations. One problem with Neff and Karney's research is that the specificity of the judgment is (perhaps inevitably) confounded with how important the judgment is in intimate relationship settings - more global judgments tend to be more relationship-relevant. For example, global characteristics such as warmth tend to be more relationship-relevant than more specific characteristics such as tidiness.

This potential confound is problematic given that Swann and colleagues (2002; Gill & Swann, 2004) have reported evidence that the extent to which a judgment is relationship-relevant is a key factor in determining the association between relationship quality and bias or accuracy. As previously mentioned, there is evidence that people desire positively biased appraisals of highly relationship-relevant characteristics but unbiased appraisals of low-relevance characteristics (Swann et al., 2002). Moreover, accuracy is more strongly related to relationship quality for more relationship-relevant judgments (Gill & Swann, 2004).

An Error Management Theory approach predicts a more complex pattern of results than either Neff and Karney, or Swann's group, postulate. As previously discussed, from an EMT perspective, overall bias and accuracy should depend on the relative benefits and costs of positively vs. negatively biased judgments. Some evidence suggests there are considerable benefits to moderately positively biased partner judgments in important domains, for example, greater positive bias in partner judgments of interpersonal qualities leads to increases in relationship quality (Murray et al., 1996b). However, research by Friesen et al. (2005) on perceptions of forgiveness following a transgression (discussed in Chapter 2) illustrates that there may also be considerable costs associated with positively biased appraisals in some highly relationship-relevant domains.

In the current research I will assess a range of judgments that vary systematically in terms of relationship-relevance and specificity, which should help to clarify which dimension is important in terms of bias, accuracy, and associations between bias or accuracy and relationship quality. In the current research I measured actual bias and accuracy for three types of judgments: 1) mate value judgments with high relationship-

relevance, as specified by the Ideal Standards Model (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999), 2) Big Five personality judgments (which are likely to be less central to relationship quality evaluations), and 3) predictions about the likelihood of the relationship remaining intact (which are clearly highly relevant to the relationship). I predicted that, in general, more relationship-relevant judgments would be more likely to be positively biased overall, and that for highly-relevant judgments, greater positive bias would be associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality. In contrast, I predicted that, in general, lower relevance judgments would be unbiased overall, and that bias for lower relevance judgments would not be associated with perceived relationship quality. I expected significant accuracy for all types of judgments, based on the argument that intimate relationships are characterized by significant reality tracking; however, I did not make specific predictions about links between accuracy and relationship quality.

I assessed perceived and/or actual bias along the dimensions of the Ideal Standards Model in all three studies of this thesis, whereas I only examined the Big Five and relationship longevity predictions in Study 3. Therefore I will discuss the Ideal Standards Model in this general introduction and provide more specific details and predictions regarding the Big Five and relationship longevity in the introduction to Study 3.

Ideal Standards Model

A central tenet of the Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher et al., 1999) is that three categories of judgments drive both initial mate selection and ongoing mate evaluation

within the context of existing relationships. These three categories are: warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources. The Ideal Standards Model was derived through a series of studies conducted by Fletcher et al. (1999) which aimed to determine the qualities and attributes that are most important to people in terms of an ideal partner. Using an inductive approach, Fletcher and colleagues constructed a scale based on the characteristics people identified as the qualities that their hypothetical ideal partner would possess. Factor analysis revealed a three factor structure. This three factor structure confirmed the authors' a priori predictions which were based on evolutionary psychological theory. Based on an evolutionary psychological approach, Fletcher et al. (1999) argued that a mate should possess good genes and make a good potential parent because these are the critical qualities for reproductive success (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Simpson & Gangestad, 1992). A vital and attractive partner is likely to possess good genes whereas a partner with status and resources is likely to both make a good parent and have good genes. Finally, a warm and trustworthy partner is likely to provide good parental and mate support. In the current research I measured desired, perceived, and actual bias using the items from the Partner Ideals Scales (Fletcher et al., 1999) because these categories form the most salient and relevant judgmental categories in intimate relationship settings.

Apart from the issue of measuring judgments on important dimensions, another advantage in using items that comprise the Partner Ideals Scales is that the three domains measured by these scales vary in the extent to which they are subjective and internal vs. objective and observable. Perceptions of warmth/trustworthiness are relatively subjective, internal, and ambiguous (e.g., kind, supportive, understanding). In contrast, perceptions

of attractiveness/vitality and status/resources are much more objective (e.g., nice house or apartment) and are more closely tied to observable behavior (e.g., good lover, adventurous). People may be more biased (or less accurate) in making more subjective judgments.

Research Overview

Across three studies I examined individuals' perceptions of bias in their own and others' relationships. In addition, I tested the extent to which individuals desired positively biased evaluations from their partners, and examined the links between actual bias, perceived bias and relationship quality ratings. The overarching goal was to test the proposition that bias in intimate relationships is (in part) a conscious and interpersonal phenomenon.

Study 1 aimed to access individuals' stereotypes of good and bad intimate relationships in order to explore lay theories about the role of biased partner judgments in intimate relationships. This study tested the hypothesis that participants would assume happy relationships were characterized by positively biased partner judgments; that is, the belief that partners in happy relationships are likely to exaggerate each other's positive qualities and minimize each other's faults. In contrast, I predicted that individuals would believe that unhappy relationships are characterized by negatively biased partner judgments.

Study 2 measured individuals' desired and perceived bias in their own, current intimate relationships. I expected that individuals would want their partners to view them more positively than their real self. Moreover, I expected that individuals would report

that they judged their partners in a positively biased fashion, and were judged by their partners in a positively biased fashion. For example, I expected that John would report that he perceived Jane more positively than Jane's real self, and that Jane perceived John more positively than his real self. In addition, I examined the associations between desired/perceived bias and relationship quality (including several potential moderating factors). I made no advance predictions about the associations between perceived bias and relationship quality (for the reasons described earlier). The sample in this study included individuals only (not couples) and therefore actual bias and its relationship to desired and perceived bias could not be assessed.

In Study 3 I repeated the same analyses as in Study 2, but with a sample of 57 couples. The main new analysis in Study 3 involved the calculation of actual bias in partner judgments and comparisons between actual and perceived bias at the individual/relationship level. I predicted that perceptions of greater positive bias would be associated with greater actual positive bias. The use of couple-level data in Study 3 allowed the examination of partner effects in addition to within-participant effects in all analyses. In some analyses I predicted within-participant effects and in others I predicted across-partner effects. As previously mentioned, I predicted that Partner A's actual bias in judging Partner B would affect the extent to which Partner A perceived that s/he was positively biased in judging Partner B (a within-participant effect). I also predicted that Partner A's actual bias would affect the extent to which Partner B thought that Partner A was biased (an across-partner effect). Finally, I investigated overall actual bias and accuracy, and associations with relationship quality. I predicted that relationship-relevance would be the critical factor in determining whether overall positive bias would

be found for particular types of judgments, and whether levels of positive bias would be associated with relationship quality.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY 1

The aim of Study 1 was to examine normative beliefs about bias in partner judgments. Individuals read one of three vignettes which depicted a fictional heterosexual couple in either a very happy relationship, a moderately happy relationship, or an unhappy relationship, then rated the extent to which the fictional partners were likely to be positively biased, negatively biased, or unbiased in their judgments of each other. I expected that the very happy partners would be rated as positively biased, exaggerating each other's strengths and minimizing each other's faults. In contrast, I predicted that the unhappy partners would be perceived as negatively biased. Finally, I predicted that the moderately happy couple would be rated as slightly positively biased.

Method

Participants

Participants were 25 men and 25 women recruited through poster advertisements at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The mean age of participants was 23.26 years (SD = 5.47, range = 18 to 50). Of the sample, 64% reported that they were currently involved in an intimate relationship (dating, cohabitating, or married).

Stimulus Materials

Three paragraph-length vignettes were created to depict a couple in a very happy relationship, a moderately happy relationship, and an unhappy relationship. The very happy couple was portrayed as possessing very high levels of satisfaction, commitment, closeness, trust, and love. To illustrate, the wording of the vignette representing the very happy relationship was as follows – *Patrick and Suzy have been dating for 18 months.*

Patrick and Suzy are extremely happy with their relationship. They are committed to being together for the long term, their relationship is very close, and they trust each other completely. Patrick and Suzy love each other (see Appendix 1 for the text of the other vignettes). The moderately happy couple was depicted as possessing moderate levels of these qualities, and the unhappy relationship was portrayed as having low levels of the same qualities. These five characteristics comprise key components of relationship quality (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000b); thus manipulating them in vignette form should create different impressions of relationship quality.

Measures

Manipulation check. To test whether I had successfully manipulated the perceived relationship quality of the fictional couple, participants were asked two questions about the fictional couple's relationship immediately after reading the vignette. First, participants were asked how satisfied they thought the couple was with their relationship (i.e., How satisfied do you think Patrick and Suzy are with their relationship? 1 = *extremely dissatisfied*, 7 = *extremely satisfied)*. Second, participants were asked to estimate the probability that the fictional couple would still be together in 12 months time.

Perceptions of bias in partner evaluations. Participants were asked to rate how realistic the fictional partners' evaluations of each other were likely to be. They were asked to provide one set of ratings for the male's evaluations of the female, and another set for the female's judgments of the male. Participants were asked to separately consider five categories of evaluation. The first three dependent measures were chosen to reflect the three judgmental domains that constitute the most centrally important partner

judgments: warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/ vitality, and status/resources (Fletcher et al., 1999; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). The final two categories assessed general positive and negative qualities. The following example demonstrates the form of all the questions - "How realistic is Patrick likely to be in judging Suzy's warmth/trustworthiness?" The response options consisted of seven point scales (1 = *greatly underestimates,* 4 = *is realistic (unbiased),* and 7 = *greatly overestimates*).

Procedure

Participants were randomly allocated (within-gender) to one of three conditions which determined which of the three vignettes they read. Participants attended the laboratory in small groups. Upon arrival at the laboratory, they were given general information about the study and instructions for how to complete the scales. After consent was obtained, participants were seated at well-spaced, individual desks to read their assigned vignette and complete the questionnaire. Upon completion of the study, participants deposited their questionnaire in a locked drop-box, were thanked, and were paid $NZ10 for their participation.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Perceptions of relationship quality. Mean relationship quality ratings for each of the three conditions are displayed in Table 2. As expected, the very happy couple were rated as the most satisfied, the unhappy couple were rated as the least satisfied, and the mean for the moderately happy couple fell in the middle. A one-way ANOVA showed

that relationship quality ratings were significantly different across the three conditions ($F = 93.41, p < .01$).

Perceptions of the likelihood of the relationship remaining intact. The very happy couple were rated as the most likely to still be together in 12 months time, the unhappy couple were rated as the least likely to still be together, and ratings for the moderately happy couple fell in between. A one-way ANOVA showed that relationship longevity ratings were significantly different across the three conditions ($F = 77.98, p < .01$). In summary, these results demonstrate that the vignettes were effective in conveying varying levels of relationship quality.

Did Perceptions of Bias Vary as a Function of Relationship Quality?

A series of 3 (relationship quality) x 2 (fictional males'/fictional females' judgments) ANOVAs, with the second factor as a repeated measure, were conducted for each of the five categories of evaluations. All five analyses revealed significant main effects for relationship quality level (F's = 11.34 to 34.44, p's < .01), with the mean ratings in the expected direction (see Figures 1 and 2, and Table 2). In all five analyses, the very happy couple was rated as the most positively biased, the very unhappy couple was rated as the least positively biased, and ratings for the moderately happy couple were in the middle. There was one significant main effect for fictional males'/fictional females' judgments which occurred for ratings of attractiveness/vitality. This showed that fictional males were perceived as more positively biased than fictional females, $F = 14.65, p < .01$. Finally, there were no significant interaction effects.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for all Scales (Study 1)

	Very happy couple			Moderately happy couple			Unhappy couple		
	M	*SD*	*t*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Relationship satisfaction	6.47	0.80		4.77	1.04		1.56	1.26	
Relationship satisfaction	6.47	0.80		4.77	1.04		1.56	1.26	
Relationship longevity	80.94	14.86		62.65	18.21		12.75	15.16	
Positive qualities									
Fictional male's bias	5.24	0.75	6.77**	4.88	0.93	3.92**	2.88	1.31	3.44**
Fictional female's bias	5.53	0.80	7.89**	4.71	0.99	2.96**	2.94	1.18	3.60**
Negative qualities									
Fictional male's bias	3.23	1.09	2.89*	3.59	0.94	1.08	5.25	1.18	4.23**
Fictional female's bias	3.41	1.37	1.77	3.76	1.20	0.81	5.13	1.20	3.74**
Warmth/ trustworthiness									
Fictional male's bias	5.18	0.88	5.49**	4.47	0.72	2.70*	2.94	1.12	3.78**
Fictional female's bias	5.18	1.07	4.52**	4.29	0.92	1.32	2.56	1.46	3.94**
Attractiveness/ vitality									
Fictional male's bias	5.88	0.86	9.05**	5.18	0.95	5.10**	3.88	1.89	0.26
Fictional female's bias	5.18	1.19	4.09**	4.47	1.07	1.82	3.19	1.68	1.93
Status/resources									
Fictional female's bias	4.00	0.61	0.00	3.88	1.11	-0.44	3.19	1.17	2.78*
Fictional male's bias	4.71	1.16	2.51*	4.18	0.73	1.00	2.94	1.34	3.18**

Note. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Next, I tested my predictions in a more focused way by conducting a series of one-sample *t*-tests to examine whether ratings on the bias measures differed significantly from "4," the mid point on the scales representing realistic/unbiased appraisals. Values significantly greater than 4 indicate positive bias and values significantly less than 4 indicate negative bias[1]. The means, standard deviations, and *t*-values for each of the major variables are displayed in Table 2. The ratings for the very happy couple were significantly greater than four in 8 out of the 10 analyses. The ratings for the moderately happy couple indicated significant positive bias in 4 of the 10 analyses, and the rest produced null findings. Finally, in 8 out of 10 analyses the very unhappy couple were rated as significantly negatively biased – a mirror image of results compared to the very happy couple. This pattern of findings was consistent with predictions.

[1] For ratings of negative qualities, scores above four represent negative bias and scores below four represent positive bias.

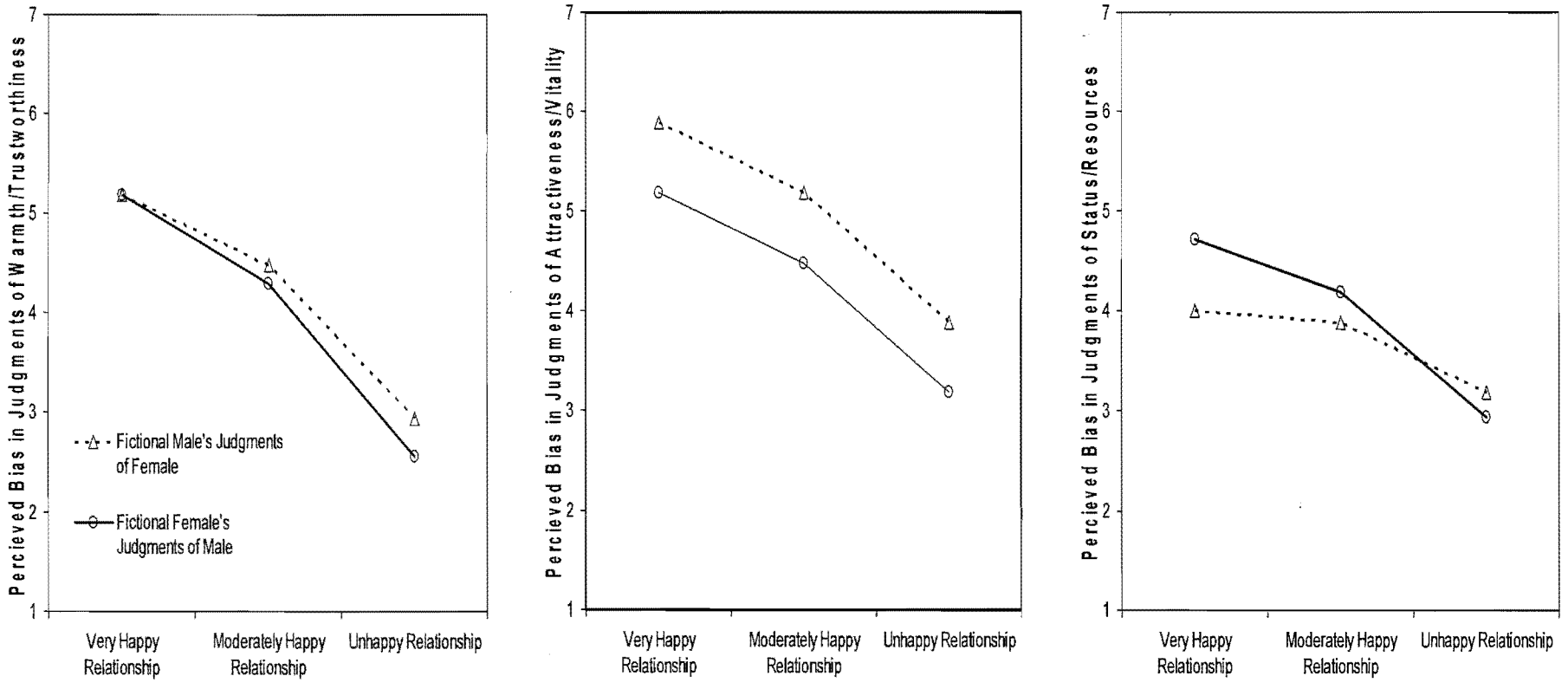

Figure 1. Perceived Bias in Mate Value Judgments as a Function of Relationship Quality (Study 1).

Figure 1. Perceived Bias in Judgments of Positive and Negative Qualities as a Function of Relationship Quality (Study 1).

Discussion

Consistent with predictions, this study showed that people have a normative expectation that bias in partner judgments will be linked to relationship quality. People thought that fictional partners in a very happy relationship would generally judge each other in an unrealistically positive fashion, meaning they would exaggerate each other's positive qualities and underestimate each other's faults. In contrast, participants associated poor relationship quality with negatively biased partner judgments, and moderate relationship quality with either positively biased or realistic (unbiased) partner judgments. The results were generally consistent regardless of whether male or female partner judgments were at issue. In Study 2, I address important questions about whether these findings extend beyond stereotypes, and whether people have insight into bias in partner judgments in their own intimate relationships.

CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY 2

The aim of Study 2 was to investigate individuals' perceptions of bias in partner judgments within their own intimate (heterosexual) relationships, using a sample of individuals who were all dating, cohabiting or married. I expected that people would be aware of the tendency for partner judgments to be generally positively biased. However, this awareness could be revealed in two distinct ways. Mary could know that she views Tom in a positively biased fashion, and she could also independently realize that Tom also views her in a positively biased way. I predicted that individuals would be aware of both kinds of bias. Thus, first, I expected that people would believe that their perceptions of their partners were more positive than their (perceived) partner's real self (a variable I termed *perceived self bias - target partner*). Second, I predicted that people would believe that their partners judge them more positively than they perceive is warranted by their own real self (a variable I termed *perceived partner bias - target self*). In addition to measuring perceptions of bias, I assessed the extent to which individuals desired biased appraisals. Based on the evidence from Study 1 (showing that positively biased partner judgments are a normative expectation of intimate relationships), and in accordance with my prior arguments, I predicted that individuals would actively desire appraisals from their partners that were more positive than their real self.

A second set of questions and predictions of this study concerned the association between perceived relationship quality and perceived bias. In Chapter 3 of this thesis I argued that greater positive bias in partner judgments could plausibly be either positively or negatively related to perceptions of relationship quality. I will briefly reiterate these arguments here. Self-verification theory (see for example Swann et al., 1992) predicts

that relationship quality will suffer if people perceive their partners (or themselves) to be positively biased, on the grounds that such biased perceptions will be interpreted as evidence that the relationship is built on an inauthentic and, consequently, unstable foundation. However, if individuals perceive positively biased partner judgments as a normative component of high quality intimate relationships (as suggested by the results of Study 1), then participants may perceive positively biased partner appraisals as a sign that their partners love them. According to this logic, perceptions of positive bias in partner judgments may enhance perceptions of relationship quality. Because both of the processes outlined above could affect the link between perceived bias and perceptions of relationship quality, I also tested several potential moderators of this relationship, including gender, relationship length, self-esteem, and depression. Again however, I had no predictions concerning the results.

In addition to examining self-esteem and depression in terms of how they might moderate any association between relationship quality and perceived bias, it is important to, 1) investigate self-esteem and depression as predictors of bias in their own right, and 2) control for these variables in examining the association between perceived relationship quality and perceived bias. Negative correlations between depression and relationship quality (typically in the range of .3-.4) are a standard finding in the literature. Thus it is important to establish that any links between relationship quality and perceived bias are not artifacts of associations between relationship functioning and self-functioning. Moreover, prior research (e.g., Murray et al., 2000) has suggested that lower self-esteem on the part of the perceiver is associated with less positive bias in partner judgments, and

that this may (in part) explain why low self-esteem is associated with poor relationship outcomes.

Finally, I tested my predictions using a broad range of judgmental domains, that prior research and theory have suggested are important in intimate relationship contexts (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources). Thus, I hoped to show that the findings generalize across judgmental domains.

Summary of Hypotheses

In summary the hypotheses for Study 2 were that:

1. Individuals would desire positively biased appraisals from their partners.
2. Individuals would explicitly perceive that their own judgments of their partners were positively biased in comparison to their partners' (perceived) actual qualities.
3. Individuals would explicitly perceive that their partners' judgments of them were positively biased compared to their own (perceived) actual qualities.
4. All prior predictions were expected to apply in the same fashion to the three central domains of mate evaluation assessed in this study (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources).

Method

Participants

Participants were 51 men and 73 women currently involved in an intimate relationship. Of the sample, 88 were dating, 27 were living together, and 9 were married. The sample was recruited using poster advertisements at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The mean age of participants was 21.73 years (*SD* = 5.36, range = 18-49). The mean relationship length was 26.22 months (*SD* = 35.82, range = 1-264).

Measurement Strategy and Psychometric Analyses

The main scales were all constructed using the 17 items from the short forms of the Partner Ideals Scales (Fletcher et al., 1999). The original scales have been shown to have excellent psychometric properties, and to comprise three distinct factors purported to represent the domains most central to mate evaluation processes (Fletcher et al., 1999). The three domains, and the items which load on each factor, are warmth/trustworthiness (understanding, supportive, kind, good listener, sensitive, and considerate), attractiveness/vitality (sexy, nice body, attractive appearance, good lover, outgoing, and adventurous), and status/resources (successful, nice house, financially secure, dresses well, and good job). In this study and in previous research using college-age samples, the phrase *potential to achieve* was added to the items from the status/resources scale (e.g., financially secure [or potential to achieve]).

The Partner Ideal Scales have been successfully adapted in previous research to measure aspects of mate evaluation other than partner ideals (e.g., Overall et al., 2005).

Participants in this study completed seven scales that were constructed using the 17 items from the Partner Ideals Scales. Four of these scales have been used in previous research, and three were constructed specifically for this study. The previously used scales included measures of self-perceptions, partner perceptions, match between current partner and ideal standards for a partner, and the original partner ideals scales. The new scales measure: a) desired partner bias - target self (how do I want my partner to perceive me in relation to my actual qualities?, b) perceived self bias - target partner (how do my perceptions of my partner compare to my partner's actual qualities?), and c) perceived partner bias - target self (how do my partner's perceptions of me compare to my actual qualities?). Further details about all the scales based on the Partner Ideals Scales are provided below. Internal reliabilities for each scale are shown in Table 3. These were all reasonable to excellent.

I sought to replicate existing research on the Partner Ideal Scales (and other scales derived from the same items), by showing that the scales in this study are comprised of the same three quasi-independent factors (e.g., Overall et al., 2005). To achieve this I conducted a series of Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs). To reduce the complexity of the analyses, the scale items were combined for each set of measures to produce three observed variables for each mate evaluation domain. For each of the seven scales used in this study, I tested and compared two models. The first model was comprised of the combined items loading on three first-order factors (representing the three key mate evaluation domains), which in turn loaded on one higher-order factor (see Appendix 2). The second model was a one-factor model consisting of all items loading on a single factor (see Appendix 2). I predicted that Model 1 would produce a better fit than Model

2. For all seven scales, Model 1 produced a reasonable fit (χ^2 [*df*=25] = 35.21 to 68.33, *p*'s <.01 to .08, CFIs = .91 to .98, RMSEAs = .06 to .14). In contrast, Model 2 demonstrated a consistently poor fit (χ^2 [*df*=27] = 235.92 to 358.07, *p*'s < .001, CFIs = .42 to .66, RMSEAs = .26 to .32). Importantly, Model 1 produced a significantly better fit than Model 2 in all cases (χ^2 change = 174.07 to 289.74, *p*'s < .001). These results suggest that the scales used in this study are comprised of three quasi-independent factors, but which also load on one higher-order factor.

Self-perceptions. Participants were asked to rate each attribute in terms of how accurately it described self (1 = *very inaccurate,* 7 = *very accurate*). Mean scores were calculated for each dimension, with higher scores reflecting more positive self-perceptions.

Partner perceptions. Participants were asked to rate each attribute in terms of how accurately it described their partner (1 = *very inaccurate,* 7 = *very accurate*). Mean scores were calculated for each dimension, with higher scores reflecting more positive partner perceptions.

Ideal standards. Participants were asked to rate each attribute in terms of how important it was in describing their ideal partner in a close relationship (dating, living together, or married; 1 = *very unimportant* 7 = *very important*). Mean scores were calculated for each ideal dimension, with higher scores reflecting higher ideal standards.

Ideal-perception consistency. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each factor in their current partner met their expectations in terms of their ideal partner (1 = *poor match to my ideal,* 7 = *completely matches my ideal*). Mean scores were

calculated for each ideal dimension, with higher scores reflecting better match between partner perceptions and ideal standards.

Desired partner bias - target self. Participants were asked to rate how they would like their partner to perceive self in relation to their actual self (1 = *very inferior,* 7 = *very superior*). They were provided with an example which stated that they should circle 7 if they wanted their partner to see them as much sexier than they actually are, as sexy as they actually are 4, and much less sexy than they actually are 1. Mean scores were calculated for each dimension.

Perceived partner bias - target self. Participants were asked to rate how they thought their partner's perceptions of them compared with their own real self (1= *very inferior,* 7 = *very superior*). They were provided with an example which stated that they should circle 7 if their partner views them as much sexier than they actually are, as sexy as they actually are 4, and much less sexy than they actually are 1. Mean scores were calculated for each dimension.

Perceived self bias - target partner. Participants were asked to compare their perceptions of their partner with their partner's real self (1 = *very inferior,* 7 = *very superior*). They were provided with an example which stated that they should circle 7 if they view their partner as much sexier than their partner's real self, as sexy as their partner's real self 4, and much less sexy than their partner's real self 1. Mean scores were calculated for each dimension.

Depression. Depression was measured using the 21-item Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979). This scale measures a comprehensive range of the cognitive (e.g., suicidal ideation), affective (e.g., sadness), and behavioral

(e.g., sleeping difficulties) symptoms of depression. For each item, participants were asked to circle one of four statements based on which statement best described how they had been feeling in the past week. Each statement carries a score from 0 to 3. Thus, the possible range of scores is 0 to 63 with high scores indicating severe depression.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using the 10-item Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale. This scale measures global feelings of self-worth (e.g., I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others). Participants rated each item on a 7-point scale with anchors of 1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree.* Negative items were reverse scored. All items within the scale were then averaged so that higher scores represent higher (more positive) self-esteem.

Relationship quality. The Perceived Relationship Quality Component Scale (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000b) was used to measure relationship quality. This scale measures satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and romance (e.g., how satisfied are you with your relationship?). Each of these six domains is assessed by three questions. Instructions were to rate the current partner and relationship on each item (1 = *not at all,* 7 = *extremely).* All items were then averaged, with higher scores representing more positive perceptions of relationship quality. This scale has good internal reliability (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2000a, 2000b), and has established good predictive validity (Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005).

Procedure

Participants attended the laboratory in small groups. They were seated at well-spaced individual desks to ensure their privacy. They were given general information

about the study in both written and verbal form, and instructions for how to accurately complete the questionnaires. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided, and told they could withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. After consent was obtained, participants were given the questionnaire. Other questionnaires were also completed which will not be reported here. When participants had completed the questionnaire they deposited it into a locked box, were thanked, and were paid $NZ10.

Results

Descriptive Analyses and some Preliminary Zero-Order Correlations

The means, standard deviations, and internal reliabilities for each of the measures are shown in Table 3. As is typical for samples of this kind, people were generally happy with their relationships, had high levels of self-esteem, and low levels of depression. Nevertheless, all the variables I assessed produced reasonable levels of variance, and all exhibited good to excellent levels of internal reliability. Consistent with previous research, warmth/trustworthiness was rated as the most important characteristic in an ideal partner, followed by attractiveness/vitality, and then status/resources (Fletcher et al., 1999; Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004).

Table 4 shows the correlations among the measures of bias. Across all three mate evaluation domains, individuals tended to assume significant levels of consistency between the extent to which their own and their partners' judgments were positively biased (see last line of Table 4). In addition, individuals who desired more positively biased appraisals also tended to perceive more positive bias (but on the warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality domains only). However, these

significant correlations ranged from .20 to .40, which suggests that the variables are measuring different (albeit overlapping) constructs.

Table 5 displays the zero-order correlations between the major variables and perceived relationship quality, depression, and self-esteem. I will report the pivotal findings in relation to explicit reports of bias later on; here I will focus on the links between relationship quality, depression, and self-esteem, and the scales measuring self-perceived mate value, partner perceptions, and ideal standards (the first section of Table 5). Replicating previous findings, more positive partner perceptions and stronger partner ideal-perception consistency were significantly associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality (Campbell et al., 2001; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000a). Moreover, these findings held across the three ideal domains, and remained significant when depression and self-esteem were controlled for (see Table 5). In contrast, depression and self-esteem were less consistently and less strongly related to self and partner perceptions (although in the expected directions). Interestingly, however, higher self-esteem was strongly related to self-perceptions of attractiveness/vitality, and to a lesser extent with self-perceived levels of potential to achieve status/resources (but not with self-perceptions of warmth/trustworthiness).

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability Coefficients for all Scales, and t-values for Bias Scales (Study 2)

	M	*SD*	α	*t*
Self-perceptions				
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.76	0.81	.83	
Attractiveness/vitality	3.96	0.76	.79	
Status/resources	5.39	0.81	.80	
Partner perceptions				
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.80	0.92	.89	
Attractiveness/vitality	5.60	0.82	.77	
Status/resources	5.56	0.98	.80	
Partner ideals				
Warmth/trustworthiness	6.19	0.68	.86	
Attractiveness/vitality	5.23	0.79	.76	
Status/resources	4.78	1.34	.90	
Partner ideal-perception consistency				
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.68	1.05	.91	
Attractiveness/vitality	5.55	0.88	.76	
Status/resources	5.29	1.22	.91	
Desired partner bias - target self				
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.23	1.17	.95	11.75**
Attractiveness/vitality	5.26	0.93	.89	15.13**
Status/resources	4.97	1.10	.92	9.80**
Perceived partner bias - target self				
Warmth/trustworthiness	4.41	0.92	.92	4.91**
Attractiveness/vitality	4.86	0.72	.76	13.18**
Status/resources	4.57	0.86	.87	7.40**
Perceived self bias - target partner				
Warmth/trustworthiness	4.54	0.86	.92	6.87**
Attractiveness/vitality	4.95	0.91	.82	9.29**
Status/resources	4.56	0.93	.89	5.38**
Perceived relationship quality	5.83	0.84	.93	
Self-esteem	5.33	1.02	.86	
Depression	0.41	0.32	.86	

Note. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Table 4
Correlations between Direct Desired and Perceived Bias Measures (Study 2)

	Warmth/ trustworthiness	Attractiveness/ vitality	Status/ resources
Desired partner bias - target self *with* perceived self bias - target partner	.34**	.20*	.16
Desired partner bias - target self *with* perceived partner bias - target self	.20*	.19*	.05
Perceived self bias - target partner *with* perceived partner bias - target self	.29**	.22*	.40**

Note. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Table 5
Associations between the Major Variables and Perceived Relationship Quality, Depression, and Self-esteem (Study 2)

	Perceived relationship quality		Depression		Self-esteem	
Self-perceptions						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.27**	(.28**)	-.09	(-.13)	-.09	(-.19)
Attractiveness/vitality	-.11	(-.16)	-.09	(.18)	.55**	(.65**)
Status/resources	.27**	(.27**)	-.26**	(.26**)	.34	(.27*)
Partner perceptions						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.32**	(.30**)	-.15	(-.10)	-.10	(.03)
Attractiveness/vitality	.56**	(.57**)	-.05	(.04)	.08	(.03)
Status/resources	.41**	(.40**)	-.05	(.06)	.14	(.12)
Partner ideals						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.24*	(.22*)	-.16	(-.09)	.16	(.10)
Attractiveness/vitality	-.24*	(-.24*)	-.02			
Status/resources	-.13	(-.16)	-.20*	(-.20)	.13	(.05)
Partner ideal-perception consistency						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.43**	(.41**)	-.19*	(-.12)	.12	(.02)
Attractiveness/vitality	.62**	(.62**)	-.08	(-.04)	.06	(-.02)
Status/resources	.44**	(.43**)	-.06	(.06)	.15	(.12)
Desired partner bias - target self						
Warmth/trustworthiness	-.12	(-.09)	.25*	(.23)	-.12	(-.01)
Attractiveness/vitality	-.06	(-.02)	.24*	(.16)	-.23*	(-14)
Status/resources	-.07	(-.05)	.11	(.06)	-.13	(-.09)
Perceived partner bias - target self						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.01	(.06)	.23*	(.18)	-.21*	(-.13)
Attractiveness/vitality	.08	(.15)	.37**	(.28*)	-.36**	(-.25*)
Status/resources	-.01	(.00)	.11	(.04)	-.18*	(-.17)
Perceived self bias - target partner						
Warmth/trustworthiness	-.05	(-.02)	.18	(.08)	-.25*	(-.21)
Attractiveness/vitality	.29**	(.32*)	.09	(.02)	-.24*	(-.26*)
Status/resources	.10	(.13)	.15	(.12)	-.12	(-.01)

Note. Figures in parentheses are beta weights from regression analyses in which perceived relationship quality, depression, and self-esteem were entered as independent variables.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Did Participants Desire and Perceive Positively Biased Appraisals?

Desired appraisals. According to one-sample *t*-tests (see Table 3), the means for the scales measuring desired bias were all significantly above 4. Recall that a score of 4 represents unbiased, realistic appraisals. Thus, as expected, participants wanted their partners to evaluate them in a positively biased fashion. These results were consistent across the three central domains of mate evaluation.

Perceptions of Bias. The means for the scales measuring perceived partner bias - target self, and perceived self bias - target partner were all significantly above 4 (see Table 3). Thus, on average, participants both believed that their own perceptions of their partners were positively biased (perceived self bias - target partner), and that their partners judged them in positively biased fashion (perceived partner bias - target self). These results were also consistent across the three central domains of mate evaluation.

Associations Between the Bias Scales and Perceived Relationship Quality, Depression, and Self-esteem

The zero-order correlations measuring the associations between the bias scales (desired partner bias - target self, perceived self bias - target partner, and perceived partner bias - target self), and perceived relationship quality were only significant in one out of nine analyses (see Table 5). The one exception revealed an association between more positive relationship quality and higher levels of perceived self bias in judgments of the partner's attractiveness/vitality. However, desired and perceived bias did not vary as a function of perceived relationship quality overall. Using a regression approach, several

potential moderators of the association between desired or perceived bias and perceived relationship quality were also tested. Four potential moderators were explored (gender, relationship length, self-esteem, and depression). The interaction term was non-significant in all of these analyses. Thus, none of these four variables moderated the effect of perceived relationship quality on desired or perceived bias.

In contrast to relationship quality, there were four out of nine significant correlations between the bias variables and depression, and six out of nine significant correlations between the bias variables and self-esteem. This pattern of significant correlations was clear-cut, suggesting that higher levels of depression, and lower levels of self-esteem, were generally associated with higher levels of both desired and perceived positive bias. I next analyzed the results by regressing each bias variable (nine analyses) simultaneously on perceived relationship quality, depression, and self-esteem[2]. Consistent with the pattern and strength of the zero-order correlations, this analysis revealed only two regressions that attained both significant multiple R's and significant beta weights. Both regressions revealed the same pattern as previously described (see Table 5); namely, a) higher levels of perceived self bias – target partner on the attractiveness/vitality domain were associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality, but with lower levels of self-esteem, and b) higher levels of perceived partner bias – target self on the attractiveness/vitality domain were associated with both higher depression and lower self-esteem.

[2] Perceived relationship quality was correlated -.13 (*ns*) with depression and .20 ($p<.05$) with self-esteem. Depression and self-esteem were correlated -.45 ($p<.01$).

Discussion

The results generally confirmed my predictions. In summary, people desired positively biased appraisals from their partners, they thought their perceptions of their partners were overly positive in relation to their partner's real self, and they thought they were perceived in a positively biased fashion by their partners. These results are consistent with the findings of Study 1, indicating that positively biased partner judgments are a normative expectation in intimate relationships.

In general, perceptions of bias and perceptions of relationship quality were not significantly related. Recall that I did not have any predictions concerning whether they should be related, as there seemed to be plausible explanations for the relation between the two constructs being either positive or negative. I also examined four possible moderators of this relationship and none of these analyses produced significant results. One explanation for these null findings is that perceived bias and perceived relationship quality are simply unrelated. However, another explanation is that I have not discovered the right moderator variables. I will return to this issue in the General Discussion (Chapter 7), and will also examine the associations between perceived bias and relationship quality further in Study 3

In contrast to relationship quality, in slightly over half of the analyses, more positive self-perceptions (high self-esteem and low depression) were associated with desiring and perceiving less positive bias. When perceived relationship quality, self-esteem, and depression were examined simultaneously, most of these associations were reduced to non-significance. However, two significant associations remained, both for judgments of attractiveness/vitality. People with lower self-esteem, and in happier

relationships, thought their perceptions of their partners' attractiveness/vitality were more positively biased. Likewise, people with lower self-esteem and higher depression thought their partners judged their attractiveness/vitality in a more positively biased fashion.

The novel findings of this study require replication with another sample. Moreover, important questions remain about whether, at the individual/relationship level, meta-perceptions of bias reflect the actual levels of bias, or whether they simply reflect normative expectations that partner judgments will typically be positively biased. These more in-depth questions about whether perceptions of bias are "accurate" and the correlates of perceived and actual bias can only be answered by studying the judgments of both members of couples, which Study 3 does.

CHAPTER 6: STUDY 3

In Study 3, a sample of couples completed the same questionnaires as were used in Study 2 (as well as several additional questionnaires). Recall that in Study 2 I used a sample of individuals, which allowed only within-participant analyses. Using couples allowed me to test some important predictions that can only be tested when data are available from both members of couples. By treating targets' self-perceptions as a benchmark for reality and comparing partner judgments to the self-perceptions of the partner, I was able to measure overall levels of bias and accuracy. The couple-level design also allowed me to calculate each individual participant's level of (actual and perceived) bias and accuracy, and answer questions about associations between these factors and other variables.

There were four central aims of Study 3. First, I sought to replicate the mean-level findings from Study 2 showing that, on average, people believe that their intimate relationships are characterized by positively biased partner judgments. Second, I investigated actual bias in partner judgments. Based on prior research and theory, I made specific predictions about the types of partner judgments that would be positively biased across the sample as a whole, and those that would be unbiased. This is an important step to rule out the possibility that the findings simply reflect the existence of a general positive bias in relationship contexts that infects any kind of partner judgment. I also investigated both within-participant and partner effects of actual bias, perceived bias, and accuracy, on perceived relationship quality. Third, I examined the associations between actual bias and perceived bias; these analyses were pivotal in terms of testing the central question of whether people are aware of the extent to which their own relationships are

characterized by positively biased partner judgments beyond any normative expectations about bias. Finally, I investigated the accuracy of partner judgments. I predicted significant levels of overall accuracy, an important prediction in terms of my overarching argument that intimate relationships are characterized by significant reality tracking.

Replicating the Within-Participant Findings from Study 2

I expected to replicate the major findings from Study 2 showing that, at the mean level, individuals a) desired positively biased appraisals b) believed their own partner judgments were positively biased, and c) believed their partners judged them in a positively biased fashion (at least when the judgments are important in intimate relationship contexts).

I also repeated the analyses from Study 2 looking at the associations between perceived relationship quality and perceived bias. However, the couple-level data obtained in this study allowed me to use more sophisticated data analytic techniques than in Study 2. In this study, I used an SEM approach that allowed me examine partner effects as well as within-participant effects. I did not make any advance predictions because there are logical reasons why the associations between perceived relationship quality and perceived bias could be either positive or negative. These arguments are discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5 but I will briefly reprise them here. The association could be negative if perceptions of positive bias are interpreted by individuals as showing the relationship is built on an inauthentic foundation that cannot be maintained in the long term (as would be predicted by Self-Verification Theory; e.g., Swann et al., 1992). However, the opposite scenario is also plausible. An individual who

believes that their partner judges them in an unrealistically positive light may view this as a sign that their partner really loves them, and this may increase their positive feelings toward the partner and relationship. In addition to examining the associations between relationship quality and perceived bias, I also examined the associations between self-esteem and depression, and perceived/desired bias (as in Study 2). There were few significant findings in these same analyses in Study 2, and I expected to replicate these null results in Study 3.

Actual Bias in Partner Judgments, and Associations Between Actual Bias and Perceived Relationship Quality

Mean levels of actual bias in partner judgments were assessed using the target partner's self-perceptions as a proxy for reality. Bias was measured in terms of overall mean differences between partner judgments and targets' self-ratings. I assessed actual bias for three types of partner judgments: mate value, personality, and the partner's commitment to the relationship. The judgments I assessed varied in terms of relationship-relevance and the extent to which they were global vs. specific. I predicted that relationship-relevance would be the critical factor in determining whether overall positive bias was found for the different types of judgments. Moreover, I predicted that positive bias would be most strongly associated with more positive relationship quality for highly relationship-relevant judgments.

Mate value. Mean levels of actual bias across the sample were assessed for partner judgments of the qualities and attributes that comprise the Ideal Standards Model

i.e., warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, status/resources (Fletcher et al., 1999). As mentioned in Chapter 3, research on the Ideal Standards Model (Campbell et al., 2001; Fletcher et al., 2000a) suggests that these characteristics are central to mate evaluation processes; judgments in these three domains drive both initial mate selection and ongoing mate and relationship evaluations. However, the three domains of the Ideal Standards Model vary in how global vs. specific the judgments are. The qualities and attributes that form the warmth/trustworthiness dimension (e.g., understanding, supportive, kind) are relatively subjective and internal, whereas the qualities and attributes that comprise the other two dimensions (e.g., nice body, successful, nice house) are relatively more objective and observable. I expected to replicate previous research showing that these (and other highly relationship-relevant) judgments tend to be moderately positively biased overall, and that such positive bias is associated with more positive relationship quality (e.g., Fletcher & Boyes, 2004).

Personality. In contrast to mate evaluations in the domains of the Ideal Standards Model, Big Five personality judgments (neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) are both less evaluatively loaded and less relationship-relevant overall. When judgments are not central to mate evaluation processes, there should be less upside to positively biased appraisals and less downside to negatively biased appraisals in terms of relationship outcomes. Thus, I predicted that there would be less evidence of positivity bias for Big Five personality judgments (compared to the mate value judgments).

Importantly, however, the Big Five personality dimensions vary in terms of how important they are likely to be in intimate relationship contexts. Of the five traits, agreeableness and neuroticism are arguably the most relevant to mate evaluation. Agreeableness (e.g., kind, cooperative, polite) overlaps to some extent with the warmth/trustworthiness domain of the Ideal Standards Model, and neuroticism is similar to an insecure attachment style. Moreover, of the Big Five personality dimensions, neuroticism has consistently been found to be the best predictor of relationship dissolution. In contrast, the other three Big Five dimensions (extroversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) seem to have weaker relevance to intimate relationship settings.

To assess bias in personality judgments, I asked each participant to provide separate ratings for, 1) their own personality, and 2) their partner's personality, in the domains specified by the Big Five Model of personality. I predicted that Big Five personality judgments would generally be unbiased overall. However, of the Big Five, judgments of high agreeableness and low neuroticism are the most likely to be positively biased because these are the most relationship-relevant of the Big Five dimensions. Moreover, more positive bias in judgments of agreeableness and neuroticism is more likely to be associated with more positive relationship quality than judgments on the other Big Five dimensions. If Big Five judgments are not significantly biased overall, it will provide important evidence that positive bias in partner judgments is not found for every type of judgment, but primarily the most relationship-relevant ones.

Partner's commitment to the relationship. The third type of partner judgments I investigated in this study was individuals' predictions of how likely *their partners* were to leave them. I asked participants how likely their partners were to end their relationships over three time periods (three months, 12 months, five years). I then compared these predictions to target partners' self-ratings of how likely *they* were to end their relationships over the same time periods. These judgments are obviously highly relationship-relevant. They are also highly specific. I predicted that these judgments would be positively biased overall, and that greater positive bias would be associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality.

Summary. In summary, I predicted that relationship-relevance would be the critical factor in determining whether partner judgments would be positively biased overall, and the association between positive bias and perceived relationship quality. I predicted that mate value judgments in the domains of the Ideal Standards Model, and judgments of partners' commitment, would be (moderately) positively biased at the mean level. Moreover, I predicted that greater positive bias for these judgments would be associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality. In contrast, I predicted that Big Five personality judgments would generally be unbiased at the mean level, and that positive bias was less likely to be associated with perceived relationship quality. I predicted that, of the Big Five dimensions, judgments of high agreeableness and low neuroticism should be the most likely to be positively biased because these personality dimensions are more important in intimate relationship contexts than the other Big Five dimensions.

Associations between Actual and Perceived Bias.

Thus far I have shown in Studies 1 and 2 that people have a normative expectation that (relationship-relevant) partner judgments will be positively biased in happy intimate relationships. I have shown that, overall, people expect that their judgments of their partners are more positive than their partner's real self. They also expect that their partners judge them more positively than is warranted by reality. However, further research is necessary to test the pivotal question of whether people can accurately judge the extent to which their own specific relationships are characterized by positively biased partner judgments, beyond normative expectations about typical levels of positive bias. To investigate this question, one must go beyond the mean-level analyses of perceived bias that I conducted in Study 2 and sought to replicate in this study.

The first step in this process was to create a measure of the extent to which each individual's partner judgments were biased, relative to levels of positive bias in the sample overall (the details of how I did this are discussed further in the method section). Once each individual's level of bias had been determined, I used an SEM approach to model the association between actual and perceived bias. This approach allowed me to simultaneously consider within-participant and partner effects. The aim of these analyses was to examine whether perceptions of bias were tied to reality. At the within-participant level, I predicted that people who actually were more positively biased would perceive themselves to be more positively biased. At the across-partner level, I predicted that people who actually were more positively biased would be rated by their partners as

being more positively biased. If these hypotheses are confirmed, it will mean that perceptions of bias are significantly accurate, supporting my central claim that bias in partner judgments is (in part) a conscious and interpersonal process.

Accuracy

Although the main focus of this research is bias, it is important to show that partner judgments are significantly accurate in order to buttress the overarching claim that intimate relationships are characterized by significant reality tracking. A core assumption of mate evaluation theories grounded in evolutionary theory (including the Ideal Standards Model) is that people's assessments of potential or current partners map onto reality. According to evolutionary theory, humans should be able to judge whether an individual will make a good partner and a good parent, and accurate social perception more generally undoubtedly had fitness advantages in our ancestral past (Fletcher, 2002).

I investigated the overall accuracy of partner judgments for the same three types of judgments assessed in the bias analyses: mate value, personality, and the partner's commitment to the relationship. The overall accuracy of the sample was assessed by correlating partner judgments with the self-perceptions of the partner. Prior research has shown that all three of these types of judgments tend to be significantly accurate. For example, Thomas (1999) found that partner judgments for Big Five personality characteristics were generally significantly accurate. Fletcher and Boyes (2004) found that partner judgments in the domains of the Ideal Standards Model were generally significantly accurate. Finally, Gagne, Lydon and Bartz (2003), and McDonald and Ross (1999), found that (under some circumstances) partners were able to significantly

accurately predict whether their relationships would remain intact. I expected to replicate these findings.

Finally, I examined the associations between accuracy and perceived relationship quality. I achieved this by computing an idiographic measure of each participant's level of accuracy, using profile correlations. As discussed in Chapter 3, the literature on the association between accuracy in partner judgments and relationship satisfaction is mixed, and null findings are common. Therefore, I did not make any advance predictions in this study.

Summary of Hypotheses

In summary the hypotheses for Study 3 were that:

1. On average, individuals would desire positively biased appraisals from their partners.
2. On average, individuals would explicitly perceive that their own judgments of their partners were positively biased compared to their partners' actual qualities.
3. On average, individuals would explicitly perceive that their partners' judgments of them were positively biased compared to their own actual qualities.
4. On average, partner perceptions would be positively biased for mate value judgments and ratings of the partner's commitment to the relationship, but generally unbiased for Big Five personality judgments. This prediction was based on the assumption that judgments that are highly relevant in intimate relationship settings are the most likely to be positively biased.

5. Partner perceptions of both mate value and personality would be significantly accurate, and there would be significant consensus between Partner A's ratings of how likely Partner B was to end the relationship and Partner B's self-ratings.
6. Perceptions of bias would be significantly accurate at both the within-participant and across-partner levels. That is, people who actually were more positively biased in judging their partners, would 1) perceive their own partner judgments as more positively biased, and 2) would be perceived by their partners as being more positively biased.
7. Perceptions of more positive relationship quality would be associated with more positively biased judgments of partners' mate value and commitment to the relationship. However, relationship quality ratings would be generally unrelated to bias in Big Five personality judgments, with the possible exceptions of agreeableness and neuroticism (which are arguably the most relationship-relevant of the Big Five dimensions).
8. Gender differences were tested but no predictions were advanced.

Method

Participants

Participants were 57 heterosexual couples all currently in intimate relationships, recruited using poster advertisements at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The mean age of male participants was 24.82 years (SD = 7.34, range = 18 to 51), and for females was 23.37 years (SD = 7.10, range = 17 to 57). The mean relationship length was 27.26 months (SD = 45.80, range = 2 to 346). Of the sample, 8.8% were married (5

couples), 42.1% were unmarried but cohabitating (24 couples), and 49.1% were dating but not cohabitating (28 couples).

Measures

Both partners completed the same scales as in Study 2. Details of these scales are reported in Study 2. Several additional sets of scales were also completed, which are described below.

Big Five personality ratings. Each participant separately rated their own and their partner's personality on a scale designed to measure the five domains that constitute the Big Five model of personality. There were three items for each domain: extroversion (extrovert/introvert, assertive/unassertive, talkative/silent), neuroticism (relaxed/tense, secure/insecure, guilt-free/guilt-ridden), openness to experience (intellectual/unintellectual, reflective/unreflective, imaginative/unimaginative), conscientiousness (organized/disorganized, responsible/irresponsible, thorough/careless), and agreeableness (kind/unkind, cooperative/uncooperative, polite/rude). Ratings were made on 7-point semantic differential scales. This scale was adapted from one developed by Fletcher, Grigg, & Bull (1988), which was based on prior factor analytic research. These scales achieved good reliability and replicated the factorial structure obtained in prior research (Fletcher et al., 1988; Thomas, 1999).

Predictions about the likelihood of the relationship being dissolved. Each participant was asked to rate how likely it was that *they* would end their relationship with their partner in next 3 months, 12 months, and 5 years. They were asked to respond by writing a percentage in the space provided. Each participant was also asked how likely it was that *their partner* would end the relationship across the same time frames, meaning a total of six questions were asked about the likelihood of the relationship being dissolved.

Procedure

Couples came to the laboratory together and received the instructions together, then the participants completed the questionnaires in separate rooms. Male participants were shown the room where the female participants would be completing the questionnaires, and vice versa. Participants were assured that the study did not include any elements of deception. Other questionnaires were also administered which will not be reported here. Each individual was paid $NZ20 for their participation.

Results

Descriptive Analyses and some Preliminary Zero- Order Correlations

The means, standard deviations, and internal reliabilities for each of the measures are shown in Tables 6 and 7. The findings were generally consistent with previous research (including Study 2). All the variables exhibited good to excellent levels of internal reliability. Individuals generally reported high levels of relationship satisfaction,

Table 6
Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability Coefficients (Study 3)

	Men			Women		
	M	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	A
Self-perceptions						
Mate value						
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.45	0.80	.81	5.56	0.53	.81
Attractiveness/vitality	4.14	0.71	.71	4.15	0.64	.66
Status/resources	5.06	1.32	.91	5.30	0.98	.79
Personality						
Extroversion	4.73	1.07	.68	5.01	1.08	.78
Neuroticism	2.14	1.25	.71	2.06	1.08	.65
Openness to experience	5.64	0.79	.58	5.68	0.70	.47
Conscientiousness	4.96	1.12	.80	5.58	0.99	.76
Agreeableness	5.56	0.89	.67	5.77	0.90	.82
Self-esteem	5.27	1.09	.88	5.19	1.17	.91
Depression	0.45	0.39	.92	0.41	0.36	.92
Partner-perceptions						
Mate value						
Warmth/trustworthiness	6.01	0.61	.81	6.39	0.56	.78
Attractiveness/vitality	5.53	0.66	.75	5.29	0.76	.72
Status/resources	4.60	1.23	.86	5.32	1.07	.89
Personality						
Extroversion	5.19	1.16	.76	5.14	1.10	.72
Neuroticism	2.06	1.13	.68	1.72	1.17	.76
Openness to experience	5.56	0.81	.57	5.46	0.86	.64
Conscientiousness	5.69	1.02	.81	5.22	1.23	.82
Agreeableness	5.82	0.93	.81	5.84	0.83	.72
Relationship-perceptions						
Perceived relationship quality	5.73	0.73	.90	6.02	0.65	.92
Partner ideals						
Warmth/trustworthiness	6.01	0.61	.81	6.39	0.56	.78
Attractiveness/vitality	5.53	0.66	.75	5.29	0.76	.72
Status/resources	4.60	1.23	.86	5.32	1.07	.89
Partner ideal-perception consistency						
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.92	0.78	.87	5.89	1.00	.91
Attractiveness/vitality	5.80	0.75	.80	5.80	0.89	.81
Status/resources	5.96	0.98	.86	5.61	1.20	.90
Perceived likelihood of self ending relationship with partner						
3 months	10.88	21.03		6.94	12.14	
12 months	18.96	27.67		18.35	24.05	
5 years	28.61	34.30		29.12	30.26	
Perceived likelihood of partner ending relationship with self						
3 months	11.07	22.44		8.68	14.24	
12 months	17.21	24.76		20.11	24.69	
5 years	26.88	31.07		28.89	29.89	

Table 7
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients, and t-tests for Bias Scales (Study 3)

	Men				Women			
	M	*SD*	α	*t*	*M*	*SD*	α	*t*
Desired partner bias - target self								
Warmth/trustworthiness	4.77	0.88	.90	6.63**	5.13	1.11	.95	7.66**
Attractiveness/vitality	4.72	0.78	.88	6.98**	5.34	0.87	.86	11.58**
Status/resources	4.66	0.93	.92	5.38**	4.95	0.98	.91	7.37**
Perceived partner bias - target self								
Warmth/trustworthiness	4.12	0.98	.92	0.89	4.33	0.96	.89	2.61*
Attractiveness/vitality	4.74	0.76	.83	7.37**	5.01	0.74	.79	10.32**
Status/resources	4.33	0.93	.90	2.71**	4.72	1.02	.87	5.32**
Perceived self bias - target partner								
Warmth/trustworthiness	4.40	0.94	.93	3.12**	4.34	1.06	.91	2.45*
Attractiveness/vitality	4.89	0.66	.68	10.20**	4.99	0.81	.75	9.32**
Status/resources	4.59	0.93	.88	4.83**	4.79	1.03	.92	5.79**

Note. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Table 8
Similarity of Self-Perceptions (Study 3)

	Similarity
Mate value	
Warmth/trustworthiness	.65**
Attractiveness/vitality	.07
Status/resources	-.03
Personality	
Neuroticism	-.08
Extroversion	-.22
Openness to experience	-.24
Conscientiousness	.33*
Agreeableness	-.05
Self-esteem	.01
Depression	.12

Note. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

and believed their relationships were likely to remain intact, especially in the short term. Ratings of how likely self was to end the relationship were similar to ratings of how likely the partner was to end the relationship for both men and women.

The correlations between self-ratings across couples are shown in Table 8. As can be seen, there was little evidence of similarity, except on self-perceived warmth/trustworthiness, and to a lesser extent self-perceived conscientiousness. As expected, and reflecting the standard finding, relationship quality ratings were correlated across couples ($r = .41, p < .01$), showing that there was significant agreement between partners regarding the quality of their relationship.

Table 9 displays the zero-order correlations between the major variables and perceived relationship quality. The pivotal findings for explicit reports of bias are shown in another table and I will report these later; here I will focus on the links between relationship quality and some of the other major variables. Consistent with previous research (including Study 2), more positive relationship quality ratings were generally significantly associated (within-participants) with more positive self-perceptions, more positive partner perceptions and stronger partner ideal-perception consistency (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001; Overall et al., 2005). There were also several partner effects. For example, women were happier with their relationships when their male partners had more positive self-perceived warmth/trustworthiness and status/resources.

As expected, people who provided more positive relationship quality ratings, reported that they were less likely to end their relationships (a within-participant effect). There was also a corresponding partner effect, whereby individuals who provided more

Table 9

Correlations between Perceived Relationship Quality and Major Variables (Study 3)

	Male perceived relationship quality		Female perceived relationship quality	
	Within-participant correlations	Across-partner correlations	Within-participant correlations	Across-partner correlations
Self-perceptions				
Mate value	.46**	.25	.32*	.35**
Warmth/trustworthiness	.31**	-.03	.18	.08
Attractiveness/vitality	.31**	.01	.31*	.27*
Status/resources				
Personality	.24	-.14	.03	.01
Extroversion	.34*	.37*	.26	.20
Neuroticism	-.25	.06	.20	-.02
Openness to experience	.23	.25	.14	.01
Conscientiousness	.34*	.16	.17	.31*
Agreeableness	.27*	.21	.32*	.14
Self-esteem	-.31*	-.18	-.33*	-.05
Depression	-.31*	-.18	-.33*	-.05
Partner Perceptions				
Mate value				
Warmth/trustworthiness	.60**	.26*	.50**	.05
Attractiveness/vitality	.52**	.00	.31*	.18
Status/resources	.36**	.03	.41**	.30*
Personality				
Extroversion	.12	.19	.15	.07
Neuroticism	-.30*	-.17	-.35**	-.05
Openness to experience	.32*	-.03	.16	-.13
Conscientiousness	.20	.04	.08	.14
Agreeableness	.41**	.22	.40**	.20
Relationship-perceptions				
Partner ideals				
Warmth/trustworthiness	.45**	-.03	.02	.24
Attractiveness/vitality	-.02	-.22	-.05	.02
Status/resources	-.18	.09	.13	-.22
Partner ideal-perception Consistency				
Warmth/trustworthiness	.52**	.22	.54**	.15
Attractiveness/vitality	.29*	.19	.42**	.12
Status/resources	.22	.03	.49**	.54**
Perceived likelihood of self ending relationship with partner				
3 months	-.67**	-.34**	-.68**	-.19
12 months	-.66**	-.55**	-.57**	-.21
5 years	-.60**	-.39**	-.48**	-.23
Perceived likelihood of partner ending relationship with self				
3 months	-.59**	-.26*	.27*	-.42**
12 months	-.66**	-.51**	-.34**	-.44**
5 years	-.59**	-.49**	-.39**	-.32*

Note. Within-participant correlations are those between individuals' own relationship quality rating and their own ratings on the major variables. Across-partner correlations are those between individuals' own relationship quality ratings and their partners' ratings on the major variables. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

positive relationship quality ratings were rated, by partners, as less likely to end their relationships.

Also consistent with previous research (e.g., Murray et al., 2000), a more positive self image was generally associated with more positive relationship quality ratings. Both men and women with higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression reported more positive relationship quality (a within-participant effect). Men (but not women) who rated themselves as less neurotic and more agreeable, reported more positive relationship quality (another within-participant effect). Moreover, there was a corresponding partner effect. Both men and women rated their relationships more positively when they rated their partners as less neurotic and more agreeable.

Did Participants Desire and Perceive Positively Biased Appraisals?

In the next series of analyses I repeated the within-participant analyses of desired and perceived bias from Study 2. These analyses provide information about average levels of desired and perceived bias in the sample overall. A series of one-sample *t*-tests (see Table 7) showed, as expected, that individuals tended to, a) desire positively biased appraisals, b) believe their own partner judgments were positively biased, and c) believe their partners judged them in a positively biased fashion. These results were consistent for men and women, and across mate evaluation domains (warmth/trustworthiness/attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources). These results replicate those of Study 2.

Actual Bias

For the next series of analyses I calculated actual bias (across-partners). Targets' self-perceptions served as a reality benchmark in these analyses. For example, male actual bias in judging their partners' warmth/trustworthiness was assessed using a *t*-test that compared males' mean ratings of their partners' warmth/trustworthiness with females' mean ratings of self-perceived warmth/trustworthiness. These analyses provide information about levels of actual bias in the sample overall. I calculated overall actual bias for three types of judgments: mate value judgments, personality judgments, and perceptions of the partner's commitment to the relationship. These analyses were conducted separately for men and women.

Actual bias in judgments of partner's mate value. A series of *t*-tests (see Tables 10 and 11) were conducted to test whether partner perceptions of mate value were biased overall. Targets' domain specific self-perceptions were used as the reality benchmark in these analyses, and all analyses were conducted separately for men and women. Partner perceptions were significantly positively biased across all three mate evaluation domains for both men and women. This means that, on average, both male and female participants overestimated their partners' warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources. These findings were consistent with predictions.

Actual bias in judgments of partner's personality. An identical procedure was used to assess whether partner perceptions of personality were biased overall. In this case, targets' self-rated personality was used as the reality benchmark. My prediction was

Table 10
Males' Actual Bias in Partner Judgments (Study 3)

	Male Partner Perceptions Mean	Female Self-perceptions Mean	*T*
Mate value			
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.85	5.56	2.30*
Attractiveness/vitality	4.70	4.15	4.88**
Status/resources	5.70	5.30	2.39*
Personality			
Extroversion	5.19	5.01	1.07
Neuroticism	2.06	2.06	0.00
Openness to experience	5.56	5.68	1.06
Conscientiousness	5.69	5.58	0.81
Agreeableness	5.82	5.77	0.46
Likelihood of the female ending the relationship			
3 months	11.07	6.94	1.85
12 months	17.21	18.35	0.63
5 years	26.88	29.12	0.73

Table 11
Females' Actual Bias in Partner Judgments (Study 3)

	Female Partner Perceptions Mean	Male Self-perceptions Mean	*T*
Mate value			
Warmth/trustworthiness	5.77	5.45	2.60*
Attractiveness/vitality	4.77	4.14	5.82**
Status/resources	5.63	5.06	3.11**
Personality			
Extroversion	5.14	4.73	3.29**
Neuroticism	1.72	2.14	2.50*
Openness to experience	5.46	5.64	1.17
Conscientiousness	5.22	4.96	1.72
Agreeableness	5.84	5.56	2.00
Likelihood of the male ending the relationship			
3 months	8.68	10.88	0.79
12 months	20.11	18.96	0.42
5 years	28.89	28.61	0.08

Note. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

that partner perceptions of personality would generally be unbiased. Consistent with this prediction, men's partner perceptions were not significantly biased for any of the Big Five traits (see Tables 10 and 11). Women's partner perceptions were not significantly biased for three out of five Big Five judgments; however they perceived their partners as more extroverted and less neurotic than their partners perceived themselves.

Actual bias in judgments of the partner's commitment to the relationship. I calculated overall actual bias for these judgments by comparing individuals' ratings of how likely their partners were to end the relationship, with partners' self-ratings. This was done separately for men and women. Against predictions, neither men nor women were significantly biased overall in predicting how likely their partners were to end the relationship, regardless of whether the next three months, 12 months or five years was considered (see Tables 10 and 11).

Summary. These results show that the extent to which partner judgments are biased depends on the type of judgments at issue. Judgments of mate value in the domains of the Ideal Standards Model were consistently positively biased. Importantly, positive bias was found for judgments of relatively subjective and internal qualities (warmth/trustworthiness), and judgments based on more objective and observable attributes (attractiveness/vitality and status/resources). In contrast, judgments of Big Five personality characteristics, and ratings of the partner's commitment to the relationship, were generally unbiased.

Associations Between Actual and Perceived Bias

All of the analyses presented thus far have been mean-level analyses. Thus, they do not show whether perceptions of bias are anchored to actual bias at the individual/relationship level. To produce an idiographic measure of actual bias, the male's partner perceptions were regressed on the female's self-perceptions (and vice versa for females' actual bias), and the residuals were saved. This was done separately for warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources. A positive residual indicates that the individual was more positively biased than the sample overall (his/her score was above the regression line of best fit), whereas a negative residual indicates that the individual was less positively biased than the sample overall (his/her score was below the regression line). Because the sample overall are positively biased, a residual of zero would still indicate positive bias.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was then used to examine the associations between perceived and actual bias in mate value judgments. An SEM approach allows both within-participant effects and partner effects to be tested, and it controls for shared variance across the partners in specific variables (e.g., perceptions of relationship quality). In each of the analyses, gender differences between the paths were tested by setting the equivalent paths across gender as equal. Next, the Lagrange multiplier (LM) test was used to determine if significant amounts of variance were explained if the constraints were released. All of the LM tests were nonsignificant, indicating the absence of significant gender differences between paths. Consequently, the within-participant and partner paths were pooled across gender. In all of the SEM analyses described below,

perceived relationship quality, relationship length, self-esteem, and depression were (separately) controlled for.

In the first series of analyses (see Figure 3), actual bias was entered into EQS as the independent variable, and the dependent variable was the degree to which the self explicitly perceived their own judgments of the partner as positively biased (perceived self bias - target partner). Separate analyses were conducted for each mate value domain. Note that in these analyses, our predictions concern the within-participant paths. The across-partner partners are shown for completeness, and to demonstrate discriminant validity. Consistent with predictions, the results show that both men and women achieved significant levels of accuracy in judging how biased their own partner perceptions were. Controlling for relationship quality ratings, relationship length, self-esteem, and depression (separately) did not change any of these results. This suggests that perceptions of bias in specific domains are not simply a function of overall evaluative positivity toward the self, partner or relationship.

Next (see Figure 4), I tested the associations between actual bias and perceived partner bias – target self. Note that in these analyses the across-partner paths are the important paths. In this case, the within-participant paths are only shown for completeness. As expected, Figure 4 shows that people who actually were more positively biased, were in turn perceived as significantly more positively biased by their partners, and these results were consistent across all three mate value domains. None of the results changed when perceived relationship quality, relationship length, self-esteem, and depression were (separately) controlled for. Again, these results show that this

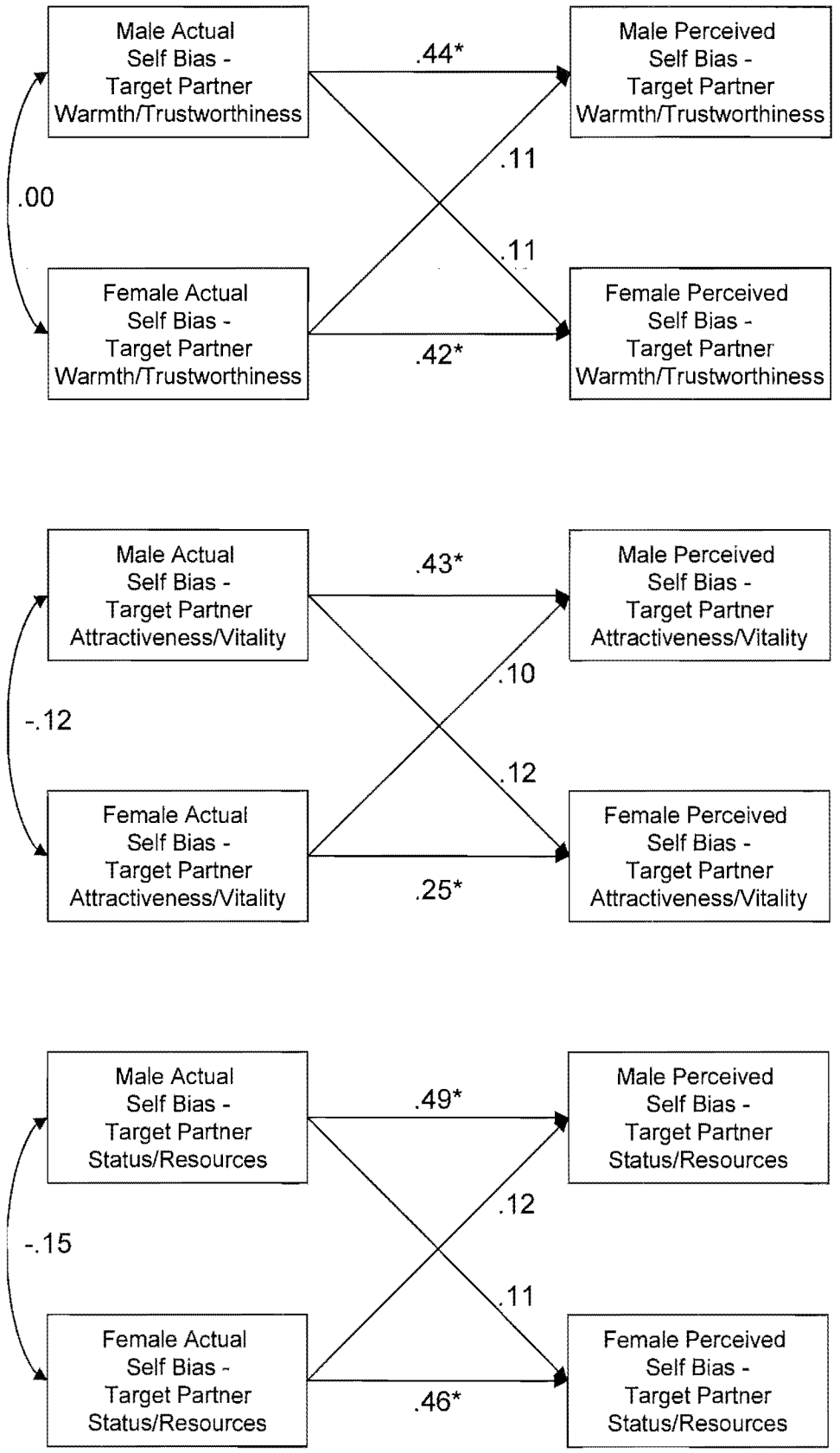

Figure 3. *Associations between Actual Bias in Partner Judgments and Perceived Self Bias – Target Partner (Study 3)*

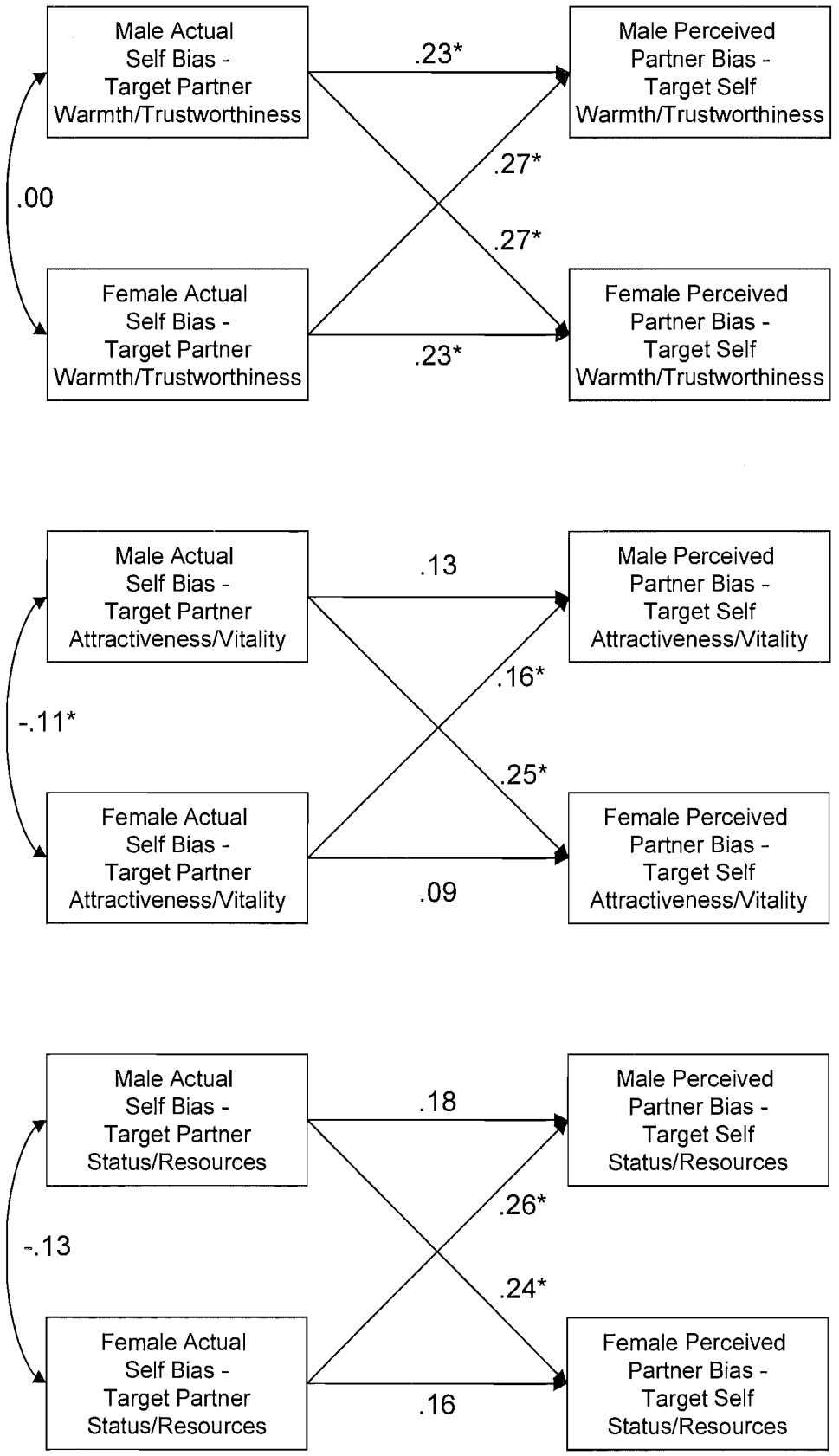

Figure 4. *Associations between Actual Bias in Partner Judgments and Perceived Partner Bias – Target Self (Study 3)*

pattern of results is not simply a function of overall evaluative positivity toward the self, partner or relationship.

To summarize, these analyses show that perceptions of bias were anchored to actual levels of bias at the individual/relationship level. People who were more positively biased in judging their partners perceived themselves to be more biased, and were perceived by their partners as more positively biased.

Summary. These analyses show that perceptions of bias are anchored to actual levels of bias at the individual level. People who were more positively biased in judging their partners perceived themselves to be more biased, and were perceived by their partners as more positively biased. These findings provide critical support for the claim that, to some extent, individuals are aware of the degree to which their own relationships are characterized by positively biased partner judgments, beyond any normative expectations about bias. Moreover, these results were not simply a manifestation of how positively individuals evaluated their relationships or themselves (in terms of self-esteem or depression).

Accuracy

The preceding analyses showed that perceptions of bias were generally quite accurate. Next, I examined whether partner perceptions were accurate more generally. If these predictions are supported, the findings would buttress my general argument that intimate relationships are characterized by significant reality tracking. Mirroring the bias analyses, I investigated overall accuracy for three types of judgments: mate value judgments, personality trait ratings, and ratings of the partner's commitment to the

relationship. In each case, targets' self-perceptions served as the reality benchmark. I predicted that all judgments would be significantly accurate.

Accuracy in judgments of mate value. Table 12 shows the correlations between partner perceptions and targets' domain specific self-perceptions. These analyses were conducted separately for men and women. For women, all three correlations were significant, showing that women's partner perceptions were generally quite accurate, regardless of the domain. These findings were as expected. In contrast, and against predictions, men were not significantly accurate for any of the domains.

Next, I recalculated the accuracy correlations described above controlling for the judge's self-perceived mate value on the target domain. These analyses were done to rule out explanations for accuracy simply in terms of individuals projecting or assuming similarity between self and partner on specific items. The results, shown in parentheses in Table 12, did not change, except for one case (females accuracy in perceiving their partners' warmth/trustworthiness, which became nonsignificant).

Accuracy in judgments of personality. As predicted, males were significantly accurate in judging their partners' personality for all five of the domains that constitute the Big Five model of personality. Females were also significantly accurate in judging their partners' conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness, but not extroversion or openness to experience. Using the same procedure as used in the mate value analyses, I investigated the effects of assumed similarity on accuracy in personality judgments. The results of these analyses are shown in parentheses in Table 12. As can be seen, none of the results changed.

Table 12
Accuracy of Partner Judgments (Study 3)

	Male accuracy		Female accuracy	
Mate Value				
Warmth/trustworthiness	.14	(.07)	.37**	(.36**)
Attractiveness/vitality	.07	(.03)	.36**	(.13)
Status/resources	.09	(.09)	.39**	(.43**)
Personality				
Neuroticism	.31*	(.30*)	.45**	(.45**)
Extroversion	.35**	(.36*)	.62**	(.63**)
Openness to experience	.33*	(.34*)	-.07	-.08
Conscientiousness	.47**	(.50**)	.54**	(.52**)
Agreeableness	.32*	(.34*)	.24	(.25)
Commitment to the relationship				
3 months	.67**	(.69**)	.34*	(.14)
12 months	.84**	(.58**)	.69**	(.43**)
5 years	.71**	(.75**)	.69**	(.53**)

Note. Male accuracy refers to correlations between males' partner perceptions and females' self-perceptions (and vice versa for female accuracy). Correlations after controlling for assumed similarity appear in parentheses.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Accuracy in judging the partner's commitment to the relationship. As can be seen in Table 12, there was significant agreement between partners in terms of how likely it was that either the male or female partner would end the relationship. Once again, I controlled for the effects of assumed similarity by conducting partial correlations with self-ratings (i.e., How likely are you to end the relationship?) as a covariate. The results are shown in parentheses in Table 12. The results did not change, with the exception of female accuracy over three months, which became nonsignificant. In addition, I recalculated these analyses controlling for the judge's relationship quality ratings. All results remained significant (r's .30 to .76, all p's <.05). Importantly, these analyses suggest that the accuracy of these judgments was not simply a function of individuals accessing and using their perceptions of relationship quality to assess the likelihood of their partners leaving the relationship.

Summary. These results show that both men and women were generally moderately accurate in judging their partners. Women were significantly accurate regardless of which type of judgments were at issue. Men were not significantly accurate in judging their partners' mate value, against expectations, but were significantly accurate in judging their partners' personality, and the likelihood of their partners ending the relationship.

Associations between Actual Bias and Perceived Relationship Quality

The remaining analyses all examined the associations between perceptions of relationship quality and, a) actual bias, b) perceived bias, or c) accuracy. In this section, I will present the results showing the associations between relationship quality ratings and actual bias.

The zero-order correlations between actual bias and perceived relationship quality are shown in Table 13. I predicted that people who were happier with their relationships would be more positively biased in judging their partners' mate value and commitment, but that bias in judgments of personality would generally be unrelated to relationship quality ratings. These predictions were supported.

First, people who evaluated their relationships more positively were more positively biased in judging their partners' mate value across all of the central mate evaluation domains. Interestingly, there was little evidence of partner effects. For example, female actual bias was related to female relationship quality ratings, but not male relationship quality ratings.

Second, people who were happier with their relationships were more likely to overestimate their partners' commitment. In other words, people who rated their relationships more positively were more likely to underestimate the likelihood of their partners ending the relationship. These findings were generally consistent across men and women, and for predictions about the next three months, 12 months, or five years. Once again, there was little evidence of partner effects. For example, female actual

Table 13
Correlations between Perceived Relationship Quality and Actual Bias (Study 3)

Actual Bias	Male perceived relationship quality		Female perceived relationship quality	
	Within-participant correlations	Across-partner correlations	Within-participant correlations	Across-partner correlations
Mate Value				
Warmth/trustworthiness	.52**	.10	.30*	.16
Attractiveness/vitality	.57**	-.12	.40**	.01
Status/resources	.36*	-.10	.33*	.27*
Personality				
Extroversion	.18	.06	.18	.07
Neuroticism	-.19	-.02	-.30*	.03
Openness to experience	.36**	-.01	.17	-.06
Conscientiousness	.09	-.10	.08	.09
Agreeableness	.38**	.15	.33*	.15
Commitment to the relationship				
3 months	-.49**	.04	-.21	-.04
12 months	-.35**	.08	-.28*	-.08
5 years	-.45**	.03	-.33*	-.11

Note. Within-participant correlations are, for example, the correlation between male perceived relationship quality and male bias in judging the female partner's warmth/trustworthiness. Across-partner correlations are, for example, the correlation between male perceived relationship quality and female bias in judging the male partner's warmth/trustworthiness.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

bias was related to female relationship quality ratings but not male relationship quality ratings.

Third, bias in personality judgments was not generally associated with relationship quality ratings, but there were several important exceptions. For both men and women, more positive relationship quality was associated with greater positive bias in judgments of agreeableness. This makes sense given that agreeableness is arguably the most relationship-relevant of the Big Five dimensions. The other significant findings were that women who were happier with their relationships were more positively biased in judging their partners' neuroticism, and men who were happier with their relationships were more positively biased in judging their partners' openness to experience. There were no partner effects.

Of course, these correlational findings are problematic because they do not control for shared variance across partners on key variables (e.g., perceptions of relationship quality). Thus, I used an SEM approach to examine the associations between perceived relationship quality and actual bias in mate value judgments in more detail. The SEM approach used was identical to the one used previously for examining the association between actual and perceived bias. These analyses require a causal direction to be specified. I entered actual bias as the independent variable and relationship quality ratings as the dependent variable. Once again, the Lagrange multiplier test was used to determine whether equivalent paths should be pooled across gender. Only one of the LM tests was significant, and the relevant paths were left unpooled (the across-partner paths for status/resources). All other pairs of paths were left as pooled.

As shown in Figure 5, both the male and female within-participant paths were positive and significant in all of the analyses. As expected (replicating the zero-order correlations), greater actual positive bias was associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality across all three mate value domains. There was one significant partner effect showing that females were more satisfied the more positively biased their male partners were in judging the female's potential to achieve status/resources. Separately controlling for relationship length, self-esteem, and depression (separately) did not change any of these results.

Summary. As predicted, whether positive bias was associated with relationship quality ratings depended on the type of judgments at issue. As predicted, people who were happier with their relationships made more positively biased judgments of their partners' mate value. These results were consistent across mate evaluation domains (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources). Also as predicted, people who rated their relationships more positively, were more likely to underestimate the likelihood that their partners would end the relationship (a positivity bias). Finally, as expected, bias in the Big Five personality judgments was generally not associated with relationship quality. The main exception was for judgments of agreeableness, arguably the most relationship-relevant of the Big Five dimensions.

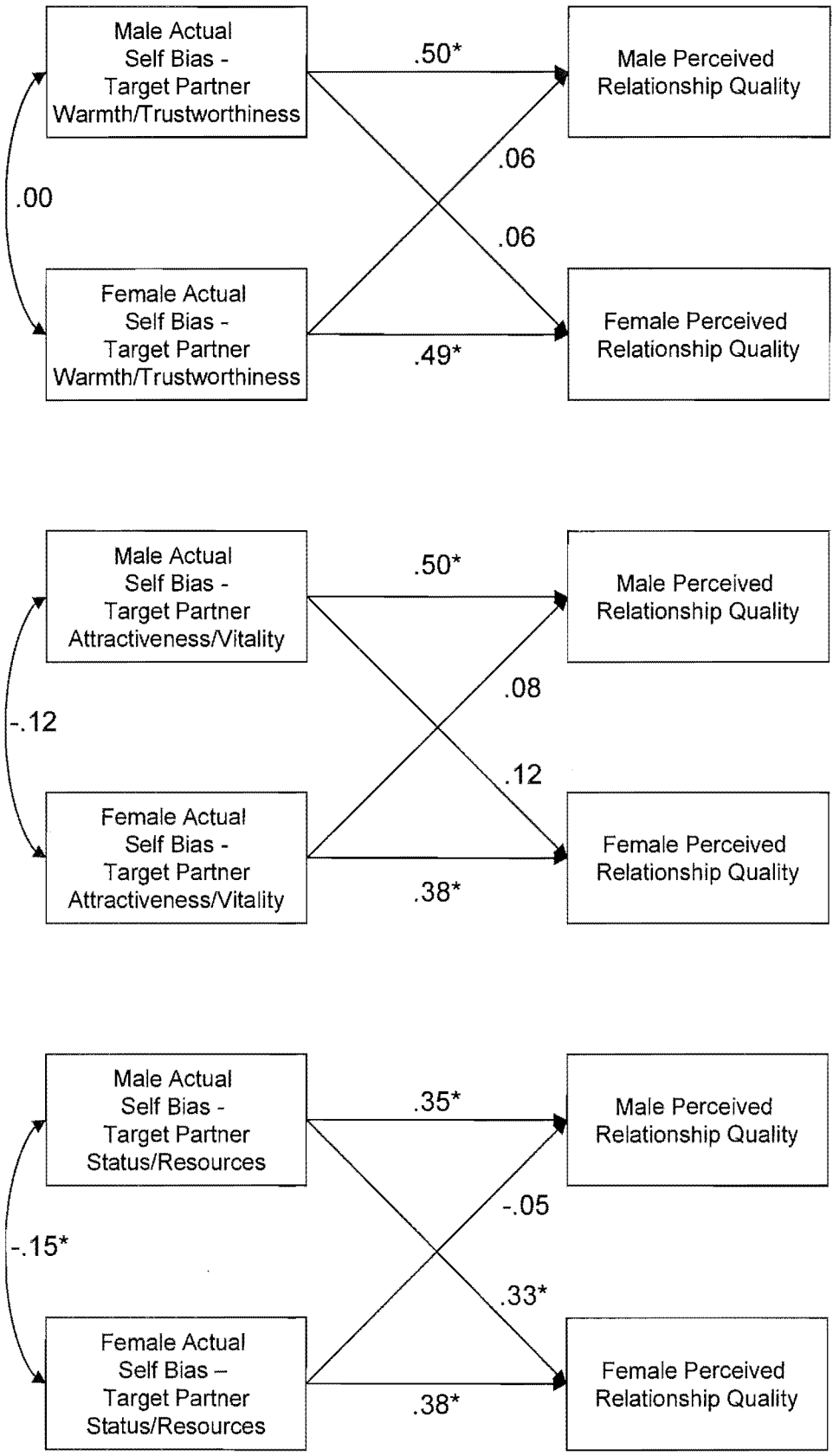

Figure 5. *Associations between Actual Bias in Partner Judgments and Relationship Quality Ratings (Study 3)*

Associations between the Bias Scales and Perceived Relationship Quality, Self-esteem, and Depression

Zero-order correlations. Tables 14 and 15 show the zero-order correlations between desired or perceived bias in mate value judgments and perceived relationship quality, depression, and self-esteem, as well as the beta-weights from regressions in which these three variables were entered as predictors of desired or perceived bias. There were few significant findings, and none that replicated across men and women. The significant findings were as follows: 1) men who had higher levels of depression, desired more positively biased appraisals of their warmth/trustworthiness, 2) women who were happier with their relationships thought their judgments of their partners' attractiveness/vitality and status/resources were more positively biased, and 3) women with higher self-esteem thought their judgments of their partners' status/resources were more positively biased. However, these results show that relationship quality, self-esteem and depression were not generally associated with desired or perceived bias.

An identical set of SEM analyses to those described in the preceding section on actual bias was conducted to further examine the associations between perceived self bias – target partner and relationship quality (see Figure 6). Once again, three analyses were performed, one for each mate evaluation domain. Perceived bias was entered as the independent variable and relationship quality ratings as the dependent variable. Also as before, the Lagrange multiplier test was used to determine whether equivalent paths should be pooled across gender. None of the LM tests was significant so all pairs of paths were left as pooled. The results showed that, for all three domains, people who perceived themselves as more positively biased, were more satisfied with their relationships (path

coefficients ranged from .18 to .28). There were no significant partner effects. Separately controlling for relationship length, self-esteem, and depression (separately) did not change any of these results, with one exception (the within-participant paths in the analysis of warmth/trustworthiness became non-significant when relationship length was controlled for).

SEM analyses, identical to those conducted for perceived self bias –target partner were conducted for perceived partner bias – target self. These revealed only one significant path. This path showed that women who were more satisfied with their relationships had male partners who perceived the female as more positively biased in judging the male's potential to achieve status/resources. When relationship length, self-esteem, and depression were separately controlled for, this path remained significant and no other paths became significant.

Summary. There was some evidence that people in happier relationships perceived themselves as more positively biased in judging their partners' mate value, however these results were weaker than the associations between relationship quality ratings and actual bias. Self-esteem and depression were generally not associated with desired or perceived bias.

Table 14
Correlations between Perceived Bias and Perceived Relationship Quality, Depression and Self-esteem for Males (Study 3)

	Male perceived relationship quality		Male depression		Male self-esteem	
Desired partner bias – target self						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.15	(.23)	.25*	(.38*)	-.03	(.11)
Attractiveness/vitality	-.04	(-.03)	.16	(.29)	.09	(.25)
Status/resources	-.14	(-.11)	.19	(.17)	-.10	(.03)
Perceived partner bias – target self						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.13	(.07)	-.13	(-.12)	.06	(-.03)
Attractiveness/vitality	.14	(.15)	-.05	(.14)	.04	(.07)
Status/resources	.13	(.13)	.05	(.12)	.02	(.05)
Perceived self bias – target partner						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.13	(.17)	.08	(.03)	-.16	(-.18)
Attractiveness/vitality	.26	(.27)	-.05	(-.03)	-.03	(-.12)
Status/resources	.22	(.21)	-.11	(-.11)	-.00	(-.12)

Note. Figures in parentheses are beta weights from regression analyses in which perceived relationship quality, self-esteem, and depression were entered as independent variables.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Table 15
Correlations between Perceived Bias and Perceived Relationship Quality, Depression and Self-esteem for Females (Study 3)

	Female Perceived relationship quality		Female depression		Female self-esteem	
Desired partner bias – target self						
Warmth/trustworthiness	-.07	(-.04)	.08	(-.03)	-.12	(-.12)
Attractiveness/vitality	.06	(.09)	.06	(.09)	-.03	(.01)
Status/resources	-.11	(-.06)	.17	(.14)	.14	(-.02)
Perceived partner bias – target self						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.23	(.24)	-.01	(.15)	.08	(.11)
Attractiveness/vitality	.12	(.18)	.13	(.21)	-.06	(.03)
Status/resources	-.01	(.05)	.18	(.19)	-.13	(.00)
Perceived self bias – target partner						
Warmth/trustworthiness	.22	(.23)	.02	(.19)	.12	(.18)
Attractiveness/vitality	.30*	(.32*)	.04	(.36)	.14	(.29)
Status/resources	.27*	(.26)	-.01	(.36)	.22*	(.40*)

Note. Figures in parentheses are beta weights from regression analyses in which perceived relationship quality, self-esteem, and depression were entered as independent variables.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$

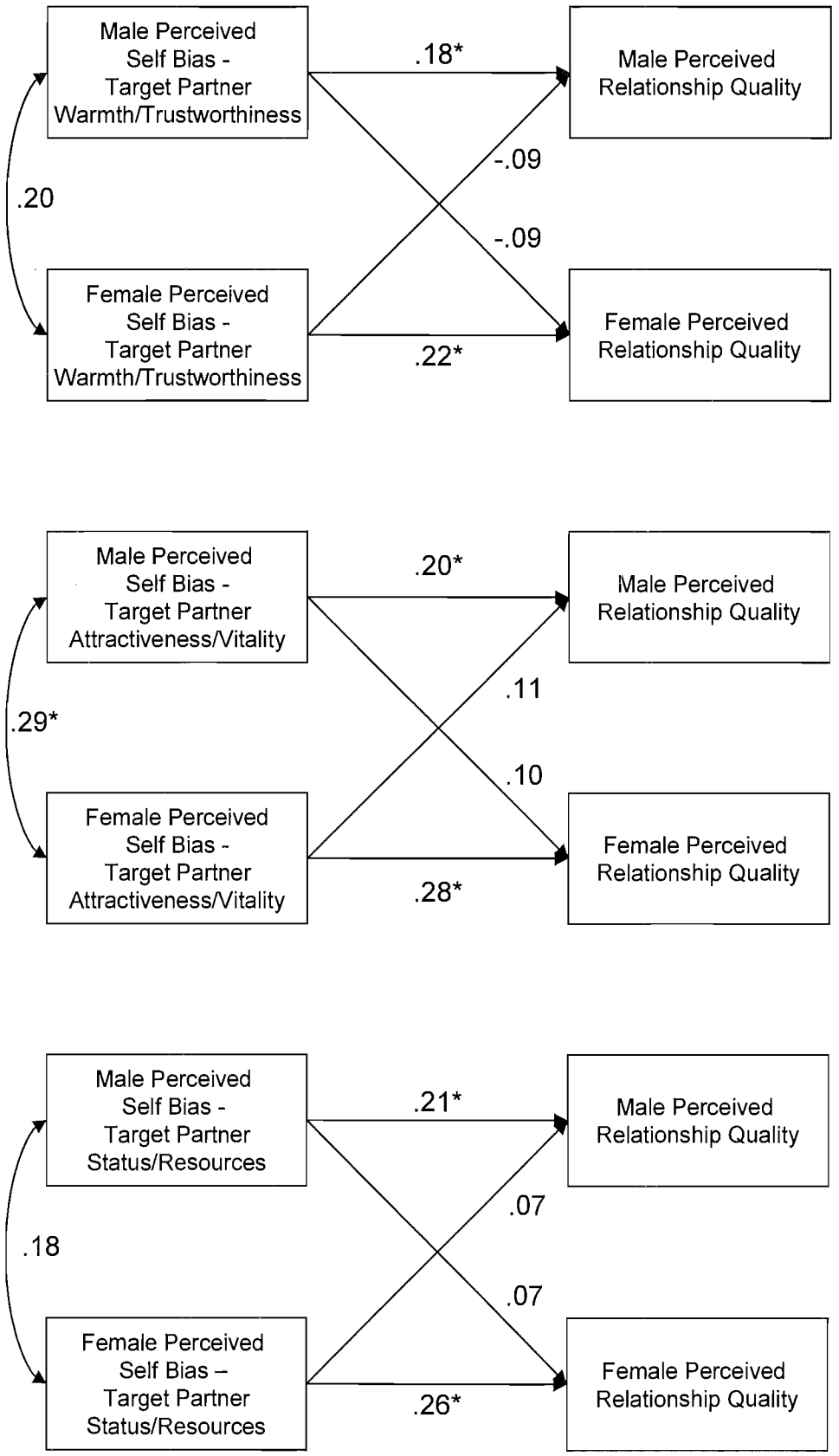

Figure 6. *Associations between Perceived Self Bias – Target Partner and Relationship Quality (Study 3)*

Associations between Accuracy and Perceived Relationship Quality

An idiographic approach using profile correlations was used to investigate the associations between accuracy and perceptions of relationship quality. The data set was flipped so that each couple constituted a variable and each variable (e.g., sexy) constituted a case. Thus case number 1 contained 4 ratings of sexiness (male's self-perceptions, male's partner perceptions, female's self-perceptions, female's partner perceptions)[3].

Male and female accuracy were calculated separately. In addition, I could calculate actual similarity in the self-perceptions of each couple, and the extent to which both males and females assumed similarity between themselves and their partners (e.g., the assumed similarity measure for the male was the relationship between the male's perceptions of self and partner).

Once these correlations were determined they were individually entered into the main data set as data points, and then the association between accuracy and perceived relationship quality was examined. Since previous research has yielded mixed results concerning the association between accuracy and relationship quality (with null findings being common) no advance predictions were made. In this study, accuracy in perceptions of mate value was not significantly correlated with either the judge's or the target's relationship quality ratings (r's = -.20 to .18, *ns*). Moreover, the results did not change when actual and assumed similarity were (separately) controlled for, that is, no nonsignificant results became significant.

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[3] Since ratings within mate value domains are highly correlated, the profile correlations were calculated based on all 17 scale items.

I followed up the zero-order correlations with a series of SEM analyses which also examined the effects of perceived relationship quality on accuracy in partner perceptions of mate value. None of the paths were significant, suggesting that accuracy is not significantly associated with perceived relationship quality.

Summary. In summary, there was little evidence that accuracy was associated with perceived relationship quality.

Discussion

The major novel findings from Study 2 were replicated in this study. In summary, at the mean level, people desired positively biased appraisals, perceived that their judgments of their partners were more positive than their partner's real self, and thought they were perceived in a positively biased fashion by their partners. Critically, this study extended Studies 1 and 2 by showing that not only is there a normative expectation that partner judgments will be positively biased, but individuals' insight into bias in partner judgments extends to an awareness of the specific levels of bias currently present in their own relationships. Impressively, individuals were significantly accurate in judging how biased their partners were in judging self (a complex and inherently interpersonal cognitive task), in addition to judging how biased self was in judging the partner. Taken together with the results from Studies 1 and 2, these findings provide compelling evidence that bias in intimate relationships is, in part, a conscious and interpersonal process.

By assessing bias across a range of judgment types, the current study has helped to clarify the types of partner judgments that are likely to be positively biased overall, and

when bias will be associated with relationship quality. Prior findings were replicated showing that partner judgments *for highly relationship-relevant* qualities tend to be positively biased at the mean level, regardless of whether the judgment at issue is global or specific (e.g., Fletcher & Boyes, 2004). Importantly however, the current study also showed that not all partner judgments are positively biased. Partner perceptions of moderately relationship-relevant, global, personality characteristics (the Big Five) were not generally positively biased overall. Moreover, unlike the highly-relevant mate value judgments, there were few significant associations between the extent to which Big Five judgments were positively biased and perceived relationship quality. Against predictions, people's ratings of the likelihood of their relationships remaining intact were not biased at the mean level. However, as expected, greater positive bias for these judgments was consistently associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality for both men and women, and for predictions related to different time periods. Overall, these findings suggest that relationship-relevance is more critical in predicting what categories of partner judgments will be positively biased than the global vs. specific dimension.

In contrast to Study 2, there was some evidence that perceptions of greater positive bias on the part of self in judging the partner was associated with more positive relationship quality, indicating that awareness of bias does not obliterate its beneficial effects. Likewise, accuracy was not significantly associated with perceived relationship quality. These null findings may reflect reality, or may reflect my failure to identify or detect important moderating factors. I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

Finally, the findings (discussed earlier) showing that meta-perceptions of bias were accurate implies that intimate relationships are characterized by significant reality

tracking. Other findings further supported this conclusion. Replicating previous research, partner judgments tended to be significantly accurate, in addition to being positively biased in some cases. These findings show that bias and accuracy can and do operate independently. Although the results of this study generally revealed quite substantive levels of accuracy, one null finding is particularly difficult to explain. Specifically, men were not significantly accurate in judging their partners' mate value in the domains of the Ideal Standards Model (although men's other partner judgments were generally moderately accurate). This null finding is problematic from the perspective of evolutionary theory because men (and women) should be highly motivated to accurately assess their partners in these domains because of the significance of these qualities/attributes in signaling reproductive fitness. One potential explanation relates to the use of the partner's self-perceptions as the reality benchmark for calculating accuracy. Perhaps it's women's self-perceptions that are inaccurate, not men's partner perceptions.

CHAPTER 7: GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this concluding chapter I discuss the findings from the three studies of this thesis in terms of four themes: 1) normative expectations about bias in partner judgments, 2) specific, individual-level, meta-awareness of bias in partner judgments, 3) the moderating effects of judgment type on overall bias, and on associations between perceived relationship quality and actual bias in partner judgments, and 4) relations between perceived relationship quality and perceived bias in mate value judgments. Following this, I reflect on how these results contribute to an integrated understanding of bias and accuracy in intimate partner judgments. Finally, I raise several caveats concerning this research, and finish with some concluding comments.

Do People Want or Expect the Unvarnished Truth from their Intimate Partners?

Taken together, these three studies provide convincing evidence that there is a normative expectation that partner judgments (at least those central to mate evaluation) will be positively biased in well-functioning intimate relationships. In all three studies, people expected that partner judgments would be more positive than warranted by the partner's real self. This effect was found regardless of whether people were asked to consider others' intimate relationships (Study 1) or their own (Studies 2 and 3). Moreover, Study 1 showed that people expect that poor quality intimate relationships will be characterized by negatively biased partner judgments, alluding to the possibility that people actually view positive bias in partner judgments as a requirement for successful relationships.

Importantly, these results demonstrate that, at least to some extent, people have conscious knowledge of biases that occur in intimate relationship settings. Consistent with this claim, Studies 2 and 3 showed that people actually *hope* that their partners will judge their mate value more positively than is warranted by their real self - a finding that replicates prior research on highly relationship-relevant judgments (e.g., Murray et al., 1996a; Swann et al., 2002).

Of note, the findings from this research are inconsistent with research on the *bias blind spot* (e.g., Ehrlinger, Gilovich, & Ross, 2005; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002). The bias blind spot is a term used to describe the tendency for individuals to report that self is less vulnerable to judgmental biases than how susceptible self perceives other people to be to the same biases. In the current research (Studies 2 and 3), people perceived themselves to be positively biased in judging their partners, in addition to perceiving their partners as positively biased.

Two critical differences between the current research and prior research supporting the bias blind spot effect may help explain this disparity. First, evidence for the bias blind spot comes from research comparing individuals' perceptions of their own biases to their perceptions of biases on the part of others unrelated to self. Second, bias blind spot research has typically investigated individuals' perceptions of their own and others' predispositions to broad classes of social-cognitive biases rather than specific judgments of specific others.

The bias blind spot can be conceptualized as an example of a self-serving bias (assuming that unbiased judgments are perceived as more desirable than biased ones). Self-serving biases that have been reliably demonstrated across a variety of different

contexts are often not evident in intimate relationship settings. For example, Murray et al. (1996a) found that partner judgments were more positive than *perceivers'* self-judgments. Murray and colleagues noted that this finding runs counter to the general tendency for individuals to perceive themselves as better than other people (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988). Although a substantial body of research has shown that self-serving biases are pervasive in most contexts, the current research adds to a growing body of literature suggesting that intimate partner judgments constitute an important exception to the tendency for people to judge themselves more favorably than other people. One possible explanation for this anomaly is that intimate relationships may function as a highly cohesive in-group in which favorable judgments of the partner reflect well on self because self and partner are intrinsically linked (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991).

Do People Know how Biased they are in Intimate Relationships?

The mean-level findings discussed in the preceding section do not provide the information necessary to determine whether people have insight into the levels of bias currently present in their own intimate relationships, beyond normative expectations about bias. Therefore, individual-level analyses were conducted in Study 3 to test whether perceptions of bias were anchored to actual bias at the individual/relationship level. As predicted, people were significantly accurate in judging the extent to which their own partner perceptions were positively biased, and the extent to which they were judged in a positively biased fashion by their partners. These findings provide the most compelling evidence to date that individuals are (in part) consciously aware of bias in relationship-related judgments. Furthermore, people's insight into their partners' bias in

judging self provides a particularly persuasive demonstration of the interpersonal nature of bias. For this finding to have emerged, partner judgments must have been behaviorally conveyed to the target partner, and the target must have been sensitive to this information.

Importantly, these effects were robust; controlling for relationship quality, relationship length, self-esteem, and depression had no effect on the results in any of six analyses. This shows that these accuracy findings were not merely products of individuals accessing and using their overall evaluations of self or their relationships to make these judgments, but rather the judgments seemed to be based on individuals making realistic assessments of specific traits in the context of the interpersonal dynamics present in the relationship.

An important task for future research is to investigate the mechanisms involved in how biased partner perceptions are conveyed to the target partner, for example the types of behavioral interactions. Sandra Murray and colleagues (e.g., 1998, 2000) have done important work showing that low self-esteem is an impediment to individuals incorporating their partners' generous view of them into their own self-perceptions. However, our current understanding of the other factors that influence how biased partner perceptions are conveyed, received, and psychologically processed by the target is limited.

That people realize that their partners view them in a positively biased fashion seems both plausible and relatively unproblematic theoretically. However, I also found (as expected) that people believed (correctly) that their own perceptions of their partners tended to be positively biased, and this may seem counterintuitive to some. If people are

aware of such biases, then why don't they adjust for them when asked to straightforwardly rate their partners' qualities? Of note, my findings, are consistent with recent arguments by Kurzban and Aktipis (in press), derived from an evolutionary modular approach to the mind, that judgments designed purely for accuracy might be walled off from judgments designed for other purposes (such as negotiation or persuasion). A similar explanation, suggested by Gagne and Lydon's recent work (see Gagne & Lydon, 2004), is that different question formats or tasks (as exemplified in the current research) can motivate people to adopt either an accuracy mental set or a feel-good orientation, thus leading to responses that appear to be discordant. My hunch is that such explanations are pointing in the right direction, and that people both can and do hold views about the qualities of self or partner that are regularly accessed and used in everyday settings, but that may be viewed as biased when in a more reflective and realistic fame of mind.

Does the Presence of Bias in Relationships lead to Happiness? The Moderating Role of Judgment Type

This research showed that not all partner judgments are positively biased overall, but primarily those that are most relevant to intimate relationship contexts. As predicted, relationship-relevance emerged as the critical factor in determining which types of partner judgments would be positively biased at the mean level. As previously noted, Neff and Karney (2002a, 2002b) have argued that specificity is a key factor in determining the magnitude of overall bias, and the associations between bias and relationship quality. To reiterate briefly, Neff and Karney suggest that, 1) global

judgments will be positively biased overall but specific judgments will be unbiased overall, and 2) bias in judgments of global qualities will be more strongly associated with relationship quality than bias in judgments of more specific attributes.

In this research I found evidence of overall positive bias for centrally important mate value judgments, and evidence that greater positive bias was associated with more positive perceptions of relationship quality for these judgments. These results were found for judgments of quite specific, objective and observable attributes and for judgments of more global, internal, and subjective qualities. Furthermore, Big Five personality judgments (which are quite global but generally only moderately relevant in intimate relationship settings) tended to be unbiased overall, and bias in these judgments was generally unrelated to relationship quality ratings. This pattern of findings is not consistent with Neff and Karney's (2002a, 2002b) argument.

Notably, by assessing Big Five personality judgments, I showed that positive bias in relationship contexts is not a blanket evaluative predisposition that infects any kind of partner judgment. The findings from this research provide important evidence that positive bias in partner judgments is only associated with relationship quality for judgments that are important in intimate relationship contexts.

Prior research by Sandra Murray and colleagues (e.g., 2000) suggests that the self-perceptions of the perceiver drive partner and relationship evaluations. If people with more positive self-perceptions tend to view their partners and relationships more positively across the board then this could account for the within-participant association between more positive perceptions of relationship quality and greater positive bias in partner judgments. However, controlling for self-esteem and depression did not change

the results, indicating the effects were not simply a manifestation of how positively individuals evaluated themselves. These findings ruled out a plausible and important artifactual explanation for the (within-participant) associations between relationship quality and bias found in Study 3.

Finally, against expectations, there was no evidence of overall bias in individuals' judgments of their partners' commitment to the relationship (although greater positive bias in these judgments was associated with more positive relationship quality ratings). Error Management Theory (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Haselton & Nettle, in press) offers another (speculative) explanation for these null findings. Prior research has typically found that partner judgments are positively biased overall. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, several recent studies have found evidence of negative bias (Friesen et al., 2005; Haselton & Buss, 2000). Haselton and Nettle (in press) have argued that whether partner judgments will be positively biased, negatively biased, or unbiased overall can be predicted by considering the relative benefits and costs associated with positive vs. negative bias for specific types of judgments. Perhaps the obvious potential costs of overestimating a partner's commitment counterbalance the benefits of enjoying a sense of security that may not be warranted by relationship reality. Another potential explanation concerns the use of the target partner's self-ratings as the reality benchmark in all these analyses. Perhaps both perceivers and targets made biased assessments of how likely their relationships were to remain intact. I was not able to assess this last possibility in the current study.

How are Meta-Perceptions of Bias related to Relationship Happiness?

Perceived bias was less strongly related to relationship quality ratings than actual bias. Across Studies 2 and 3 few zero-order correlations were statistically significant. However, in the SEM analyses in Study 3, people who perceived themselves as more positively biased in judging their partners' warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources, were happier with their relationships. However, only one out of six partner effects was statistically significant, and analyses of the associations between relationship quality ratings and perceived partner bias – target self revealed only one significant path (out of twelve paths).

Importantly, the findings from Studies 2 and 3 suggest that detecting positive bias does not cause individuals to experience crippling doubts about the viability of relationships built on somewhat unrealistically sanguine foundations. This proposition makes sense if one considers the results from Study 1 showing that individuals' lay theories about intimate relationships incorporate the notion that positively biased partner judgments are a sign of a good relationship.

I examined several potential moderators of the association between perceived relationship quality and perceived bias in Study 2 (relationship length, self-esteem, depression, and gender). None of these analyses produced significant results. However, moderating analyses are conservative analyses and the research design used here may not have been powerful enough to detect real interaction effects. In addition, there may well be other important moderator variables that I have not identified.

Integrating the Bias and Accuracy Findings

Bias findings, like the ones found in this research, have typically been interpreted as evidence of how love and attachment processes distort people's perceptions - the implications being that people in happy intimate relationships are adrift from reality, and that intrapsychic processes are more influential in intimate relationships than the interpersonal reality the partners share. Although significant accuracy effects are often reported in research focused on bias, they tend to be downplayed. Firstly, researchers have argued that typical accuracy effects are small in comparison to the size of typical bias findings (e.g., Murray et al., 1996a). Secondly, researchers have often underscored bias effects by showing that significant bias is still evident when accuracy effects have been controlled for (e.g., Murray et al., 1996a).

The current research found evidence of overall positive bias in partner judgments and links between bias and relationship quality (for high-relevance judgments). However, in general, both partner perceptions and meta-perceptions of bias were moderately accurate. These findings provide general support for the idea that positivity and truth-seeking motives operate simultaneously in intimate relationship settings, and these motivational stances tend to produce judgments which are both positively biased and significantly accurate (Fletcher et al., in press).

Moreover, this research shows that bias findings should not automatically be interpreted as showing that people in intimate relationships are out of touch with reality, and emphasizes the need to strike a balance between attending to intrapsychic processes and giving adequate consideration to reality-driven, interpersonal processes.

Caveats and Limitations

Several caveats and limitations should be considering in interpreting the results from this research. First, the participants in this research were predominately young and unmarried, and the generalizability of the findings to older, married couples and other cultural contexts cannot be assumed. Second, the evidence obtained here concerning the moderating role of judgment type in overall bias and associations between bias and relationship quality remains correlational. Experimental designs that systematically manipulate relationship-relevance and specificity are needed to further clarify the role of judgment type. One issue in designing such an experiment is that, in general, relevance and specificity are inherently confounded such that more global judgments tend to be more relevant than more specific judgments. Third, although I found some evidence of positive associations between perceived bias and relationship quality at the cross-sectional level, longitudinal research is needed for a fuller understanding of the effects that meta-perceptions of bias (and the effects of accuracy in perceptions of bias) have on relationship quality at different stages of relationship development.

Finally, as noted previously, bias in relationship judgments may be driven by many different psychological processes. I do not claim that the findings from this research will generalize to every kind of judgment or underlying process. Indeed, it is unlikely that people will have introspective access to the intrapsychic processes involved in producing, say, positively biased attributions for their partners' behavior. To use another example, people may be quite unaware of the extent to which their attachment working models automatically influence their perceptions of current relationships. My tentative suggestion is that lay meta-awareness, and associated accuracy, in judgments of

bias in relationship settings will be enhanced by two criterial features, both found in the current research. First, the existence of an accessible and relevant folk theory or belief (e.g., love is blind) should help individuals to be sensitive to the occurrence of related positive biases. Second, if the judgments in question - such as self and partner judgments of attractiveness - are embodied in frequent interpersonal behavior (e.g., explicitly discussed), the biases will become observable in action, and thus, be more likely to be noticed and recalled.

Conclusions

Despite the extensive literature on bias and accuracy in intimate relationship settings, there are relatively few points of consensus and interpretational debates are endemic. This research exemplifies the point that understanding bias and accuracy in interpersonal contexts requires the examination of psychological processes that operate both at the intrapsychic level, and at the level of dyadic interpersonal processes. More specifically, the current research contributes to our understanding of bias and accuracy in intimate relationship settings in two major ways. First, the results challenge previously untested but pervasive assumptions about the intrapsychic and unconscious nature of biased partner judgments, and show these biases can be recast as (in part) conscious and interpersonal phenomena. Second, the results suggest that partner judgments central to mate evaluation (but not low-relevance partner judgments) tend to be positively biased overall, independent of whether the judgments are global or specific. The results also show that positive bias tends to be associated with relationship satisfaction for highly relationship-relevant judgments not for low-relevance judgments.

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Appendix 1 – Study 1 Vignettes

Very happy couple

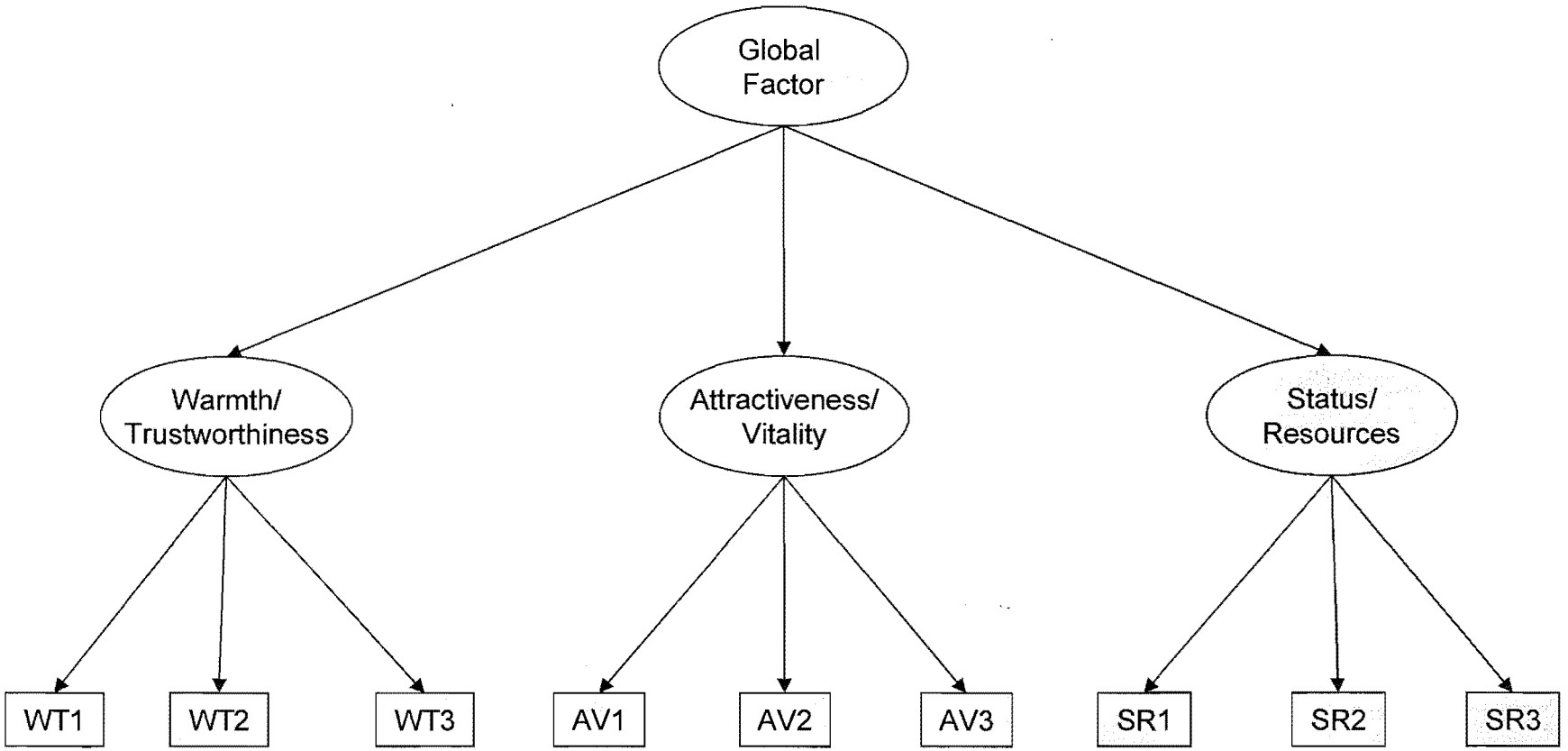
Patrick and Suzy have been dating for 18 months. Patrick and Suzy are extremely happy with their relationship. They are committed to being together for the long term, their relationship is very close, and they trust each other completely. Patrick and Suzy love each other.

Moderately happy couple

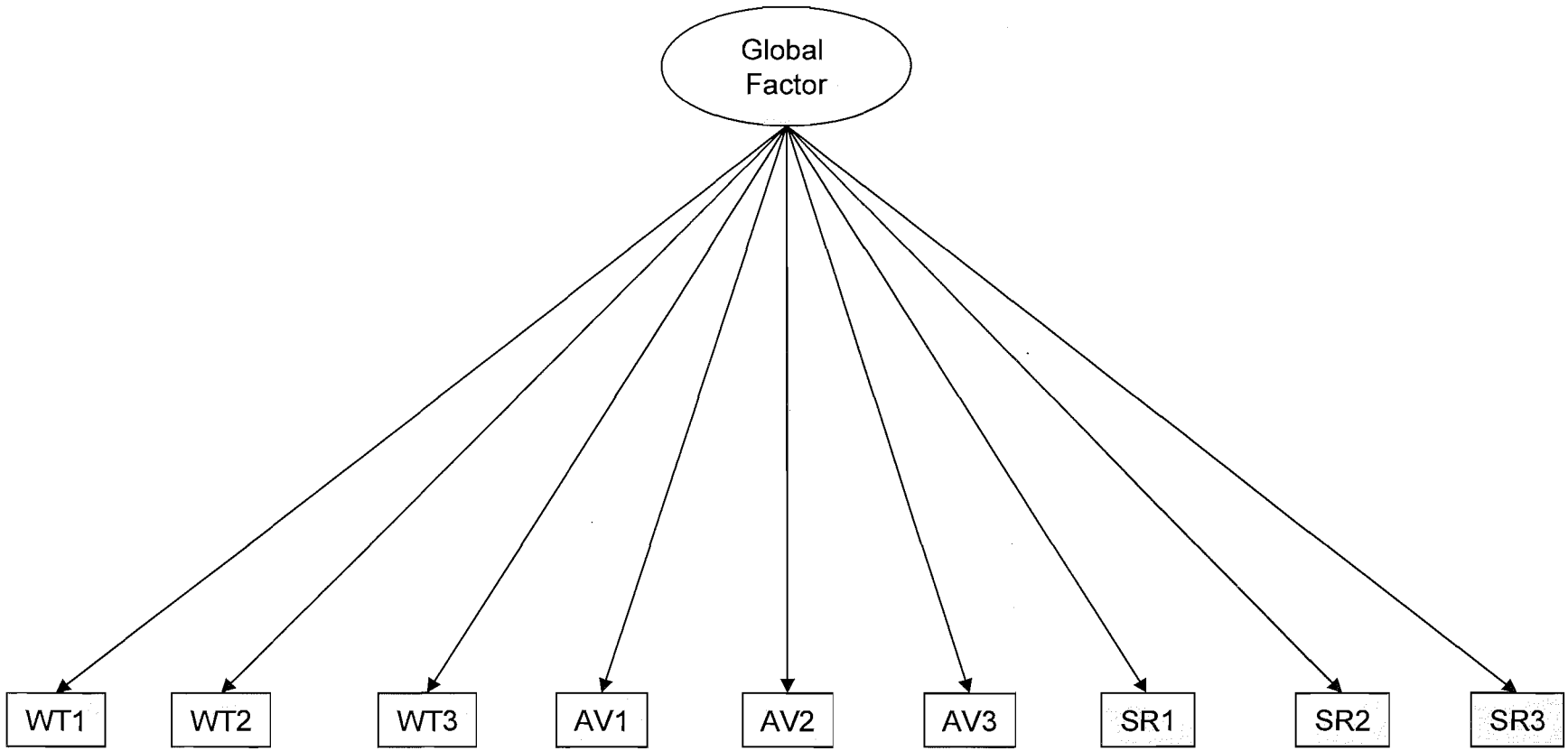
Patrick and Suzy have been dating for 18 months. Patrick and Suzy are moderately happy with their relationship. They are committed to being together for the medium term. Their relationship is quite close and they trust each other. Patrick and Suzy are very fond of each other.

Unhappy couple

Patrick and Suzy have been dating for 18 months. Patrick and Suzy are unhappy with their relationship. They are considering breaking up, their relationship is not close, and they do not trust each other. Patrick and Suzy do not love each other.



Appendix 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model 1 (Study 2)



Appendix 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model 2 (Study 2)